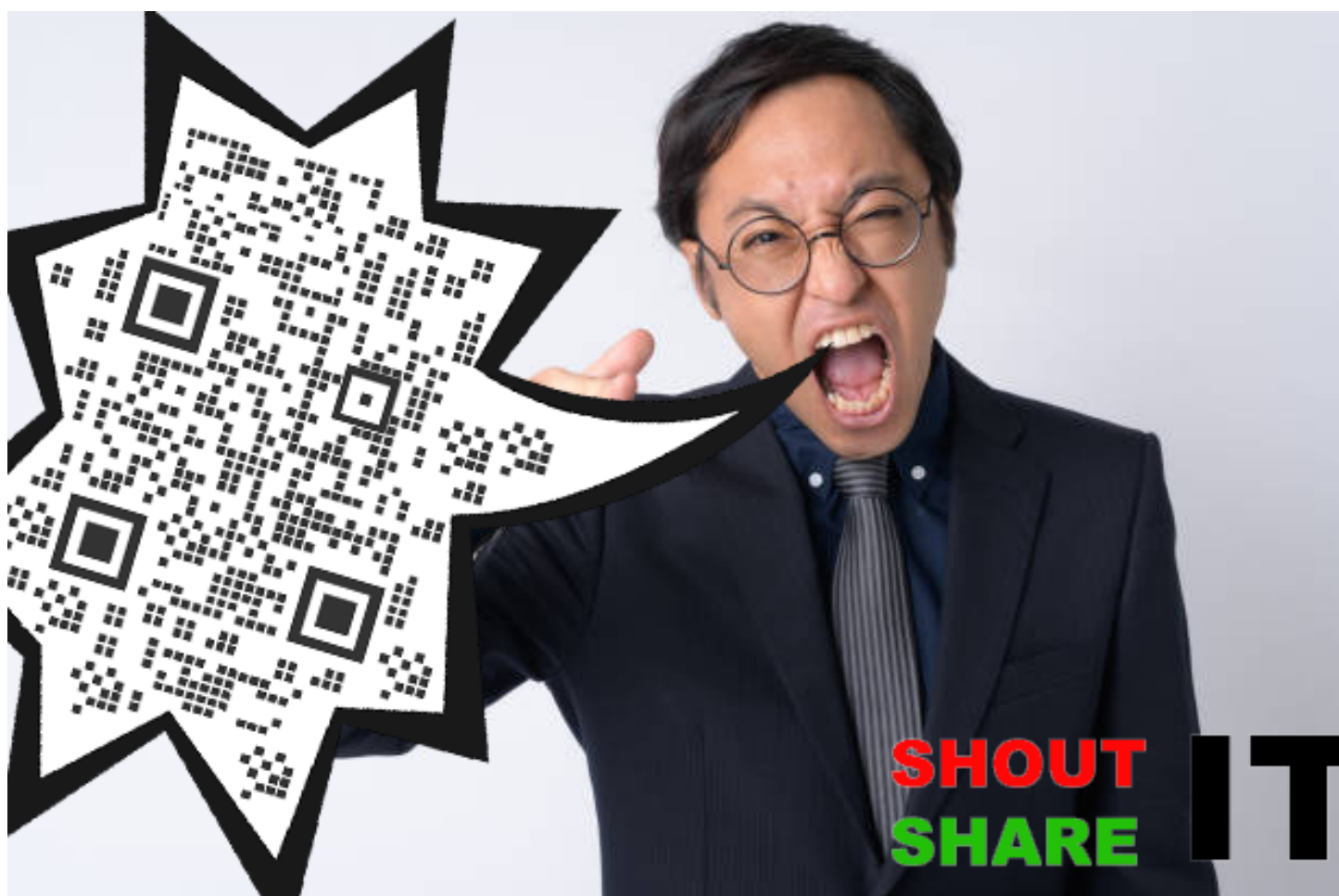




The Global Ethiopian Diaspora

Migrations, Connections, and Belongings

Edited by Shimelis B. Gulema, Hewan Girma and Mulugeta F. Dinbabo



The Global Ethiopian Diaspora



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Acknowledgments

The Global Ethiopian Diaspora: Migrations, Connections, and Belongings is a result of years of collaborative work among three scholars—two based in the United States and the other in South Africa. The three of us have long engaged with issues of migration and the making of diasporas, with a specific focus on Ethiopia and the greater Horn of Africa region. This book project took some five years from inception to publication. We approached a wide range of scholars, both emerging and established, from different regions of the world (Canada, Ethiopia, Europe, and the United States), and representing multiple disciplinary traditions. The result was a rich and diverse collection of original research papers, which would eventually constitute the book in its current shape.

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Shimelis Bonsa Gulema
Hewan Girma
Mulugeta F. Dinbabo

Introduction

Transnational Migration and the Making of the Global Ethiopian Diaspora

Shimelis Bonsa Gulema, Hewan Girma,
and Mulugeta F. Dinbabo

Migration, both internal and external, has been an essential part of the history of Ethiopia. Although internal migration has historically been fundamental in shaping the fabric of Ethiopian society, migration across national borders is nonetheless gaining momentum, especially in the last fifty or so years. What began as a trickle in the early twentieth century has now become a veritable surge. According to current estimates, over 2.5 million Ethiopians live outside the country itself. If we are to include second- and third-generation Ethiopian descendants, that number is likely double. The change taking place in Ethiopian migration at present is not limited to the scale, scope, or destinations of migration, although each is significant in its own right. This change also includes the nature of Ethiopian transnational migration, from what was essentially seasonal or transient to one that has increasingly become permanent. We cannot move forward in our understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon without undertaking a retrospective analysis, identifying lacunas and theoretical contributions that go beyond specific case studies.

Migration results from a range of different types of economic, social, and political changes. As a series of sometimes contradictory processes, migration cannot be separated from its effects and causes, which touch upon every aspect of human life. In the Ethiopian context, successive waves of internal and external mobility were largely a response to changes in the country's political economy: a fundamentally feudal mode of production was replaced by one that was socialist, which, in turn, was succeeded by a developmental stage that combined a market economy with an interventionist state. Migration was negotiated at every historical point, demonstrating coexisting

and sometimes contradictory social conditions. To some, migration has become a central fact of life. At times, it has become an apt response to uncertainties, sometimes better than the unappealing certainty of staying put. In other cases, migration equates to expulsion, a coerced act resulting from pressures enacted by powerful macro actors, such as the state.

The Ethiopian diaspora is both extensive and diverse, and Ethiopia itself is one of the largest African sources of transnational migrants. Moreover, Ethiopia both sends migrants and receives them as a transit nation (particularly for refugee populations from Eritrea, Somalia, and South Sudan). These various migrations have implications for questions of nation-state building, ethnonational identity, socioeconomic development, gendered interactions, social stratification, and much more. In order to gain a better understanding for these movements and their implications, a historical, geographic, and thematic analysis of Ethiopian migration and diaspora is warranted.

In this introductory chapter, we offer a discussion of the state of knowledge and current debates on the Ethiopian diaspora. We also consider the theoretical and methodological parameters of this debate and suggest alternative frameworks and vocabularies for interrogating and understanding Ethiopian migration and diasporic experience. Our discussion begins with a critical interrogation of the frameworks and concepts that have shaped the study of migration, especially in Ethiopia. Existing migration literature has enriched understanding of the migration dynamics in the country. At the same time, however, research to date is plagued by its use of uncontested assumptions, its fixation on certain geographical and temporal categories, and its disregard for discussions of issues hitherto considered marginal to the migration debate, such as art and culture, the making of communities, and the role of religion. This section interrogates the literature on Ethiopian transnational migration and processes of diasporization, teases out their defining features, and engages with the methodological and theoretical logjams that have limited or impoverished migration and diaspora studies. It then calls for a rethinking of existing scholarship while offering alternative ways of studying migration and diasporization in the context of neoliberal globalization.

A Very Brief History of Migration in Ethiopia

Before we focus on the status of research on Ethiopian migration and diaspora, it is worth providing a brief historical overview of Ethiopian migration. In the following, we identify key time periods and literatures to examine Ethiopian transnational migration, starting from a survey of migration patterns in pre-twentieth-century Ethiopia, followed by studying

these movements during the imperial period and then under succeeding post-revolutionary regimes. In outlining the historiography of Ethiopian migration and its diaspora, we do not seek to give a sense of neat and self-contained time periods but work from an understanding that acknowledges the fluidity of the boundaries and the interpenetrating nature of migration processes. Historiography also implies a critical interrogation of the production of migration knowledge, the frameworks and methodologies employed, and alternative ways of theorizing and studying contemporary Ethiopian migration.

A constant theme in Ethiopian history is the history of internal mobility, both small- and large-scale, of individuals and groups of people from one part of the country to another. Such movements include those that resulted from adventures by enterprising individuals and, more consequentially, those that mobilized large groups of people. In the case of the latter, we find communities moving in large numbers as part of collective cultural practices or due to the effects of drastic ecological changes, such as drought and famine, that precipitated a search for resources. Groups also followed the state in the conquest and settlement of new areas. In all, these movements had lasting effects through transforming Ethiopia's demographic landscape as well as its social and political history.

Not including those that had occurred in previous centuries, Ethiopia witnessed a series of transformative population movements beginning in the fourteenth century, with such movements occurring particularly in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, and the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. The first resulted from the successful military expansion of the medieval Christian kingdom, especially during the reign of its arguably greatest monarch, Amde Tsyon (1314–44), when vast areas in the south, east, and west were brought under its control (Tamrat 1972). Conquest brought about a large-scale population movement from the northern highlands and central Ethiopia to the new lands. The following two centuries saw massive population movement, but this time in a reverse direction, from the south to the north. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the victorious armies of Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi of Harar (c. 1508–43), also known as Ahamd Gragn (“the left-handed”) moved into the predominantly Christian territories of the Ethiopian empire, which also led to the settlement of Muslim Ethiopians there, especially in places like present-day Wello and Shewa (Arab Faqih 1894). However, the most enduring and transformational development was the movement of the Oromo, which had been taking place since the second half of the sixteenth century (Hassen 1990). The Oromo were a predominantly agropastoralist community with a deep tradition of out-migration, partly as a requirement of their Gadaa culture, although such migrations remained small-scale until

the mid-sixteenth century. But the wars between the Christian medieval Ethiopian empire and its contemporary Muslim rivals during the sixteenth century and the devastations that followed weakened both sides, creating a vacuum that the Oromos readily exploited. They expanded to the center and into the east of the country and eventually into the west and the north. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Oromo had succeeded in controlling much of the southern half of the country. The demographic and political implications of this phenomenal expansion were remarkable. As a result, Ethiopia was never the same.

In the nineteenth century, a reverse movement began, from the north to the resource-rich southern half of Ethiopia. It was spearheaded by the Ethiopian state, especially under the leadership of Menelik II, first as King of Shewa (1868–89) and later as Emperor of Ethiopia (1889–1913) (Donham and James 1986). Some see these southward movements of the state and its retinue (church, soldiers, and peasants) as a means to reconquer territories lost to the Oromo in the previous centuries and figured as part of a long and complicated process of nation-(re)building (Levine 1974). Yet for many inhabitants of the regions, this expansion was a brutal occupation that ushered in a period in which local populations were marginalized and oppressed, the Oromo being the largest such group (McClellan 1988). While the narratives concerning this latest phase of Ethiopian migration history are intensely divergent and partisan, this movement itself nonetheless created a pattern that intensified in the succeeding decades: movement to and settlement in the southern half of the country, largely in search of better economic opportunities. The south came out of this profound process as the most culturally diverse and dynamic region of Ethiopia. At the same time, this dynamism rested on a system that was fundamentally oppressive, exclusionary, and therefore unsustainable. The 1974 revolution that ended the Solomonic dynasty restructured this oppressive system; movement to the south, however, continued unabated. The reason remained the same: populations were attracted to the vast regions of the south, presuming them to be abundant with fertile land and resources.

From the twentieth century onward, we can identify three dominant patterns of internal migration within Ethiopia. The first, which has a longer history and existence, is the southward movement of individuals and families hoping for a slice of the resource-rich south. Since the early 1990s, when Ethiopia was reorganized along ethnic lines, movement between the different ethno-regional states has been limited, if not entirely nonexistent. Instead, migration to the urban areas of the country gained momentum throughout the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. Towns and cities have become new magnets for migrants from the vast rural areas and small towns. Young people, predominantly men but with a growing number of women,

began moving to urban areas in search of freedom from the drudgery and restrictions of rural life and, more importantly, in the hope of a better life. Urban centers, especially major cities like Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, have a disproportionate concentration of the country's wealth, resources, and opportunities (Golini et al. 2001). The widening inequalities between rural and urban life lie behind the seemingly unstoppable internal migration taking place in contemporary Ethiopia.

In addition to the aforementioned internal migrations, another important trend in the history of Ethiopian mobility is cross-border migration to foreign destinations, both near and far. International migration and the making of Ethiopia's international diaspora have a very old history, and contemporary cross-border movements should be seen as a continuation of a deeply entrenched tradition. Historically, whether as free individuals or through enslavement, Ethiopians moved to other areas in Africa as well as across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Ethiopians were already established in Jerusalem, for instance, as far back as the sixth century BCE (Kaplan 2017). The Ethiopian presence in the Arabian Peninsula, especially since the rise of Islam, is well documented. Beginning with Bilal ibn Rabah (c. 580–640), Islam's first Muezzin, Ethiopians in Muslim Arabia were able to acquire prominent positions as royal praetorian guards, military officers, political officials, and religious scholars. Most remained subjects, though, enjoying little to no opportunities for social mobility. Many were used as soldiers, concubines, or household servants and were unable to free themselves from the chains of generational servitude, even after having converted to Islam (Erlach 2006). Until slavery was officially abolished in Ethiopia in 1942, the practice continued both internally and externally, resulting in the dispersal of enslaved Ethiopians in the Arabian Peninsula and around the Indian Ocean. Shell (2018), for example, documents that in the early twentieth century enslaved Ethiopians arrived in what is now South Africa after their ship, destined for the Arabian Peninsula, had been diverted by British patrols in the Red Sea.

The Indian subcontinent (including the modern countries of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) could be seen as the second most important destination for migrants from the eastern seacoast of Africa, including Ethiopia. Multiple indications of the African presence in the Indian Ocean World can be found dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Cases of isolated migrations from Africa long predated this period, however, going as far back as the tenth century. Most Africans in Asia came from what was known as the Swahili Coast, which stretches from Somalia all the way to Mozambique. Many Africans were enslaved from the interior of this region and transported across the Indian Ocean, mainly to South Asia. A few of them must have come from Ethiopia, largely because references to Ethiopia

or Abyssinia abound in the region, especially in the names of prominent military and political leaders, in places as Sachin, Janjira, and Deccan, and the use of Habasha/Habshi¹ to denote a community of Africans in South Asia (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst 2003).

Unlike their counterparts in the Americas, some of the enslaved Africans in the Indian Ocean World enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom and opportunities for upward mobility. A few of them rose to prominence as political, military, and spiritual leaders and founders of their own independent states. Malik Ambar (c. 1548–1626), for example, rose to become a prominent military leader and known for his defense of the Deccan from the Mughals in the mid-sixteenth century (Ali 2016). He constructed a fort at Janjira in Gujarat where a large community of Africans created their own independent kingdom and defended it from the Mughals and Marathas. Another group of enslaved soldiers, also called Habshis, seized power in the Bengal Sultanate and created their own dynasty in the late fifteenth century. Descendants of the Habshis (also known as Siddi, an honorific Arabic term of respect) still live dispersed over several parts of India and Pakistan. Here, they number between twenty and fifty thousand and lead a life of abject poverty, racism, and marginalization (Pillai 2018).

In the late twentieth century, the modern version of migration from Africa to Asia took on a new form. At this point, migrants were predominantly young women traveling to work as domestic servants in southwest Asia. Although it is difficult to find exact numbers—partly owing to the shroud of secrecy and illegality under which part of the migration process occurs—one can safely say that tens of thousands of Ethiopians and people from other parts of the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan), women in most cases, leave their countries annually, via legal and illegal routes, to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and countries in the Persian Gulf. Many become housemaids and lead precarious lives because of their meagre salaries. At times they are not paid, denied basic freedoms, routinely subjected to insidious racism, and experience sexual violence (Alemayehu 2014). Numerous cases record women being attacked by their employers, and even burnt alive or thrown from buildings to their death. Some have committed suicide, unable to tolerate their harsh living and working conditions along with the shame of finding their hopes (of doing well, settling debts incurred from paying for the cost of migration, and improving the lives of their loved ones, etc.) dashed. Although governments in destination

1 Habasha/Habshi (ሐበሻ) is an ethnic or pan-ethnic identifier that has been historically employed to refer to populations in the highlands of Ethiopia and Eritrea that speak Semitic languages and are predominantly Orthodox Christians.

countries have started to deport migrants, estimated in hundreds of thousands—at times forcibly, because of declining economic conditions owing to falling oil prices, the recent Covid-19 pandemic, and a global economic slowdown—migrants have been undeterred and keep returning against all the odds. This is fuelled by worsening economic conditions at home, which are themselves exacerbated by political turmoil and environmental degradation. Ethiopian migration across the Red Sea will continue for the foreseeable future so long as there are disparities—real or imagined—in levels of prosperity, security, and stability between the two regions.

This eastward migration of largely female labor to the Arabian Peninsula occurs concomitantly with another movement that is predominantly male and directed towards Europe and the broader West. Historical references point to the presence of Ethiopians in Europe during the medieval period; among these were Ethiopian Christian pilgrims who established residence in the Vatican in the fifteenth century (Kennerley 2020; O'Mahony 1996). More often, though, the Ethiopians who left the country were enslaved and taken to Europe involuntarily to serve in the houses of European nobles or employed in armies, while a few were placed in the service of European governments. Mahbuba (c. 1825–40)—alternatively spelled Machbuba and known by her birth name Bilillee—for example, was purchased by the German Prince Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Pückler-Muskau, to whom she served as a close confidante (Pankhurst 1979). The remarkable career of an enslaved Ethiopian named Abram (Abraham) Hannibal (c. 1696–1781), however, is exemplary of how Ethiopians served European statecraft. Abram is said to have come from the northern part of the country, was taken into custody by the Ottomans, who ruled Ethiopia's coasts at the time, and was eventually given as a gift to the Russian emperor, Tsar Peter the Great. Abram would eventually become a prominent military leader in the Russian empire and a great grandfather of arguably Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin (Barnes 2006). While Mahbuba and Abram represent standard narratives of upward mobility through migration, the story of Prince Alemayehu is something of an exception in this regard. Alemayehu was the son of Emperor Tewodros II (1855–68) and, following the death of his father in the fight against the British, was taken to England, treated as a royal hostage, and died there at the tender age of nineteen (Francis 2007).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ethiopians headed to Europe and eventually to North America, initially in small numbers, and most often on scholarships and, therefore, on a temporary basis. The earliest cases were those who were sent to Europe during Emperor Haile Selassie's reign to learn technical skills and to receive a modern education for the purpose of eventually returning to serve their country (Pankhurst 1962; 1990). People

like *Negadras*² Gebre Heywet Baykedagn, a young Ethiopian who went to Europe, was educated at Berlin university, and returned to his homeland, for example, would eventually constitute the nucleus of the reformist intellectuals of early twentieth-century Ethiopia (Baykedagn 1912). Ethiopians also crossed the Atlantic and moved to North America, predominantly the US. Although the earliest documented reference to Ethiopians arriving on Ellis Island in New York dates to the early twentieth century,³ Ethiopian migration to North America began in earnest only after the 1960s,⁴ coinciding with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that opened US immigration to non-white people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Almost all of the Ethiopians who arrived in the US in the 1960s were sent by Haile Selassie's imperial regime for education and returned once that education had been completed. Some included members of the ruling class whereas many came from humble backgrounds. However, this early pattern of migration—small-scale, temporary, and government-sponsored—would give way to one in which Ethiopians left the country on a permanent basis, in increasingly large numbers, after the turmoil that engulfed their country following a violent revolution in 1974. This in fact marks the beginning of the making of the global Ethiopian diaspora, whose early origin is deeply connected with revolution, violence, and persecution. The trend continued throughout the 1980s, when an explosive combination of political turmoil, deepening economic crisis, social tension, and environmental disaster both fuelled and fundamentally transformed the nature of Ethiopian transnational migration. In this time, it became a large-scale movement by predominantly young and educated people, who migrated on a more permanent basis. An increasingly important feature of this new phase of Ethiopian migration is the use of clandestine and illegal ways to flee the home country and enter into countries of destination. Such routes often involved the risk of serious danger to oneself, including the loss of life. These patterns deepened in the 1990s as the level of out-migrations increased significantly (Solomon 2007).

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- 2 *Negadras* is an aristocratic title meaning “head of merchants,” essentially serving as the mayor of a town.
 - 3 This is a reference to the arrival of over “60 Abyssinians” who traveled on board of the SS *Chicago* from Le Havre, France, in 1902. They were identified alternatively as Borena or Somali and photographed by Augustus Sherman. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/10/travel/from-ellis-island-portraits-of-a-new-america.html>.
 - 4 A few Ethiopians migrated to the US prior to the 1960s, including Dr. Melaku Beyan (1900–40), a student active in organizing black solidarity with Ethiopia during the Italian invasion in 1935. Dr. Melaku was trained as a physician (Howard University, 1936) and was the first documented Ethiopian to receive a college degree from the US.

The resurgence of nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the West has dented migration from the Global South, but the West neither has nor could completely seal off its borders. It has become increasingly clear that migration will continue or even intensify as long as there are inequalities between the Global North and the Global South; as with migration across the Red Sea, mentioned above, perceptions—real or imagined—of disparities in levels of prosperity, security, and freedom, will continue to drive migration in the years to come (Fasil 2017).

A discussion of contemporary migration dynamics and Ethiopia's place in it would not be complete without a brief reference to the rise of Ethiopia—a country often regarded as a source of migrants—as a major destination for migrants. The Horn of Africa in general experiences all kinds of human mobility including mixed and irregular migration, temporary job-seeking movement, and displacement as a result of environmental catastrophes (Horwood 2009). Because of a complex set of diverse socioeconomic, political, and ecological factors, Ethiopia has become a leading country involved in the transit of migrants to different regions of the world (Adugna 2019). Moreover, due to its geographical location, its comparatively good political climate, and better economic position in the Horn of Africa region, Ethiopia's significance as a destination for migrants from the rest of the region is currently growing (UNHCR 2019). According to a report by the UNHCR, almost one million immigrants, mainly asylum seekers and refugees, were living in Ethiopia in 2019, giving Ethiopia the second-largest immigrant population in Africa. The majority of migrants and refugees come from three countries: 46.6% from South Sudan; 28.4% from Somalia; and 19.2% from Eritrea. Ethiopia is also host to a smaller number of refugees originating from Syria, Yemen, and Arab countries. Social instability, economic turmoil, and the devastation of ecosystems in the Horn of Africa are the main reasons for a large number of registered and unregistered migrants in Ethiopia.

The Horn of Africa is still experiencing a considerable increase in mixed and irregular migration flows (Kanko, Bailey, and Teller 2013). Some of those migrants arrive in Ethiopia through well-organized networks of Trafficking in Persons (TiP). This is because Ethiopia is considered as a springboard and is widely used as a staging ground for regular and irregular migration to Europe and America. Human rights violations, robbery, and to some extent sexual abuse remain a harsh reality for these mobile communities. Insecurity, lack of economic prosperity, drought, and food shortages are among the push factors that drive migrants to search for better opportunities to embark on dangerous migration routes in different parts of the region (Kanko, Bailey, and Teller 2013).

Studying Ethiopian Migration and the Ethiopian Diaspora: Sources and Features

The general patterns of African migration have been the subject of a good deal of research to date (e.g., Akyeamong 2000; Baker and Aina 1995; Curtin 1996; Flahaux and Haas 2016; Kane and Leedy 2013; Koser 2003; Okpewho and Nzegwu 2009; Zeleza 2009). These publications examine a range of issues including, but not limited to, diasporization, transnational and global affinities and affiliations, diasporic agency, mimicry, black transnational modernities, black expressive cultural practices, and black cosmopolitanism. Such works have set the theoretical and methodological parameters of the study of African migration and have expanded our knowledge about the culture, history, and political economy of African migration within and outside of the continent. Nevertheless, the study of African migration is handicapped by two interrelated factors. The first is that research that seeks to address migration from a continental perspective in the name of describing broader Africa-wide migrations tends to sketch broad outlines of the migration dynamics and therefore to overlook or gloss over the specificities of migration processes. The second handicap, however, is the opposite of the first: the analysis of specific migration processes alone fails to appreciate the interconnections that transcend geographical, theoretical, and methodological boundaries.

What is missing in much migration research is sustained interdisciplinary study of a phenomenon as complex as human mobility. What is needed, therefore, is a study of migration that is decompartmentalized with regard to geographical or disciplinary boundaries; this would be a study of migration that is comprehensive enough to address broader contours and trends while recognizing the specificities involved in migration processes.

Although transnational migration and diasporization have acquired growing significance, scholarship on the processes and their long-term consequences is still in its infancy, especially as it relates to Ethiopia. Nevertheless, there has been a steady increase in the volume and quality of research in recent years. While there are very few book-length studies dedicated to Ethiopian migration and diasporization (e.g., Demissie 2017; Getahun 2007; Shelemay and Kaplan 2015), a significant number of scholars have addressed this subject in journal articles and shorter pieces. Existing scholarship's leading concerns in this context are political organization (Chacko and Gebre 2017; Fransen and Kuschminder 2009; Hercog and Kuschminder 2011; Kuschminder and Siegel 2013; Lyons 2007) and questions of identity and socio-cultural organization (Chacko and Gebre 2017; Hafkin 2006; Mohammed 2005). Scholars within Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies have also been concerned with economic issues, such as investments in the homeland and remittances (Andersson 2014). A large swathe of scholarship

focuses on settlement challenges faced by refugee populations (Getahun 2006). Lastly, a new body of research—much of which exists in the form of unpublished dissertations (e.g., Girma 2018)—is emerging, dealing with issues of return migration and the circular nature of contemporary migrants, a process that has gained momentum because of the progress of globalization and the opening up of countries of origin.

Geographically, scholars have delimited the experiences of Ethiopian migrants based on their regions of settlement, particularly emphasizing the differences between settlements in the West versus the Middle East (de Regt and Tafesse 2016). A growing body of work studies Ethiopian migrants in South Africa (Gebre, Maharaj, and Pillay 2011), but virtually no research focuses on Ethiopian migrants in other parts of the vast African continent. This is surprising given the fact that most Ethiopian migrants end up in neighboring countries such as Sudan or Kenya, although these countries largely serve as places of long-term transit.

Needless to say, Ethiopian migration is a complex phenomenon and the diaspora that has evolved as a result is far from being a unified single entity. There are significant differences in the diaspora that warrant deeper examination. Scholars have examined the experiences of the Beta-Israel (also known derogatorily as Felashas), sometimes seen as part of the larger Ethiopian diaspora and sometimes as something altogether separate (Ben-David and Ben-Ari 1997; Kaplan 1999). A growing body of work examines a separate Oromo diaspora (Bulcha 2002; Jalata 1995; 2002; Sorenson 1996). Some of the key questions and/or conclusions that arise from these latter studies is the separate identity of the Oromo diaspora and its qualitative difference from the rest of the Ethiopian diaspora. Current Ethiopian politics animates the discourse and study of migration and the making of the diaspora, going some way to explaining why there is a growing trend to compartmentalize Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies. The result has been a growing focus on the study of the experiences of specific ethnic and cultural communities in and outside of the country while ignoring the ties that bind them.

As indicated earlier, scholarship on Ethiopian transnational migration and diaspora is growing and our understanding of the process is correspondingly expanding. This development is, to a large extent, a consequence and reflection of the increasing significance of cross-border migration, its enduring implications for migrants as well as host and sending countries, and the growth of a globally dispersed Ethiopian diaspora. The last twenty or so years have seen a steady building of scholarship on the culture and political economy of Ethiopian transnational migration, the processes of diasporization, the nature of ties that bind migrants to their homeland and to their new homes, and the politics of return.

However, within scholarship on Ethiopian experiences, transnational and diaspora studies remain largely peripheral, if not neglected. There are

significant theoretical, conceptual, and methodological problems with the study of this crucial component of the modern Ethiopian experience. Overall, we find that the study of the Ethiopian diaspora and/or Ethiopian transnational migration lacks synthesis, theoretical depth, and historical grounding. Much of the scholarship, empirical in nature, lacks both systematic theorizing and that combination of comparative and interdisciplinary approaches that diaspora and migration studies require. Almost none of these works discusses a path forward for Ethiopian migration/diaspora studies.

To begin with, Ethiopian studies, which are fundamentally Ethio-centric, continue to privilege the nation as the preeminent unit of analysis. The “nation,” unlike other categories, structures much of the intellectual practice in Ethiopia, as elsewhere. In Ethiopia, though, the significance of the nation as a framework of analysis is given a privileged position, partly as a legacy of the deep-rooted idea of Ethiopian exceptionalism and the consequent “paradigm of difference” which have long organized the scholarship on Ethiopia and Ethiopians (Ullendorf 1988; Tibebe 1995; 1996). While granting a considerable measure of pride of place to the study of nation and national processes, such a “nation-centric” methodology, however, marginalizes the study of processes that occur within broader territorial frameworks and are essentially transnational and global in nature.

Another is the simplistic binary schema within which fledgling Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies are conducted. On the one hand are those works—and this was especially common in early works of Ethiopian diaspora scholarship—that associated complex migratory processes with political factors such as war, violence, and persecution; while, on the other hand are studies that attribute more recent “exoduses” of Ethiopians solely to worsening economic conditions. These one-dimensional narratives and simplistic oppositions are constraining and incapable of explaining a migration process that is more complex and dynamic. Rethinking this approach and developing alternative ways of understanding the migration dynamic is imperative.

In this regard, one can discern at least three broad—if not sharply distinct—phases, thematically and chronologically, in the trajectory of Ethiopian migration scholarship. During phase one, in the 1980s and 1990s, the principal focus of migration scholarship was the study of why and how Ethiopians were leaving the nation for the world, first as a trickle and then as a wave. Such research placed the nation and what happens in it to cause migration at the center of its analysis. More often, political factors—civil war, violence, and state persecution—are used to explain the migration of Ethiopians, predominantly the elite, sometimes at the expense of grasping the status of economic factors—e.g., real or imagined disparities in levels of development and prosperity—that were arguably the major reason why many Ethiopians, mostly the rank and file, were increasingly leaving the country.

The new millennium, starting in the late 1990s, heralded the beginning of the second phase. This second phase brought with it a shift in the unit and focus of analysis of the Ethiopian transnational migration experience. Economic factors and the search for opportunities for an alternative or better livelihood were now prominently in the focus of migration studies. Other equally important factors addressed included—but were not limited to—political developments and the growing significance of existing networks of dyadic and familial relationships. Of particular importance in this phase of scholarship was the emergence of the diasporic space as a crucial framework of analysis. This shift foregrounded the importance of issues of diasporization, transnational or diasporic belongings, bifocal identities, racism, and marginality in analysing migration and diaspora.

A more recent development in the trajectory of Ethiopian migration scholarship is the study of return and circular migration, two important trends that have been gaining momentum in the last ten or so years. The significance of phase three lies not just in the change it represents towards the exploration of themes that are not just novel but also disruptive of the paradigmatic assumptions of migration scholarship. Interrogating circularity as a new form of movement, reflective of the contemporary human condition, is a defining feature of this new scholarship. At the same time, instead of the study of homeland and diaspora as two separate spaces, phase three seeks to transcend geographic, conceptual, and methodological boundaries and explore both areas as two interconnected and interpenetrating spatial, conceptual, and temporal constructs in which new forms of affinities and affiliations, new imaginings and practices of belongings are made possible but also continuously recalibrated.

A Brief Note on Conceptual Frameworks

The Global Ethiopian Diaspora explores the complicated processes involved in Ethiopian transnational migration and the making of the global Ethiopian diaspora. To do so, it employs several organizing themes that structure its analysis of processes of migration and diasporization. Major recurrent concepts in this edited volume include notions of complexity, fluidity, heterogeneity, intersectionality, and social constructivism. A frequent theme in the book is the notion of belonging and the ambivalence it involves as migrants often find themselves in a precarious condition of suspension between not being here and not being there. The march of globalization and advances in technology, compressing time and space in the process, are supposed to ease this contradiction and help migrants to easily navigate the complicated world of membership in constantly evolving understandings of community—local,

national, transnational, and global. One of the failures of the scholarship on the transnational Ethiopian migration experience is the tendency to present such a long, evolving, and complicated process as something static and smooth. The narrative of homogeneity, linearity, and binary opposition in which disparate migration and diasporic experiences are presented is therefore simplistic and misleading.

The Ethiopian experience of transnational migration is extremely heterogeneous in terms of the dynamics of migration (causes of migration, process of migration, identities of migrants) and the experiences and practices of diasporization (in which multiple—rather than one—Ethiopian diasporas are produced with their own shared as well as distinct experiences). Although migration and diasporization tend to accentuate the diversity and complexity of migrant and diaspora experiences, existing scholarship tends to undertake a reductionist exercise that constructs a one-dimensional account which, in turn, hinders a fuller understanding of these multifaceted human processes. Likewise, the use of a binary framework to understand and interpret this complicated experience is theoretically impoverished and methodologically constraining. One such binary is that between the migrant as a prudent adventurer in search of opportunities versus the idea of the migrant as a person who betrays a community or a nation by the very act of migrating. This opposition between good versus bad with regard to migrants and migration is deeply flawed and unproductive. Nonetheless, it pervades the public's imagination of transnational migration and migrants, and informs some scholarship on the subject in turn. Moreover, any interpretation that fails to ground itself in study of power dynamics, agency, the porousness of borders, and the fluidity of belonging is analytically constraining.

This volume seeks to enrich discussions of Ethiopian transnational migration and diasporization by emphasizing concepts of multidimensionality, intersectionality, ambiguity, multiplicity, and fluidity. While constructing a coherent narrative of migration and diasporization, the contributions in this volume still aim to complicate the analysis of these processes by offering more complex, heterogeneous, and non-linear accounts. A socially constructivist approach informs our analysis of migrant identities, diasporic belongings, the nature of their location in the diaspora, and their links with their country of origin. The following section expands on one of the units of analysis we used in the volume: the complexities, fluidities, and ambivalences of belonging.

Migration and the Ambivalence of Belonging

The theme of belonging, both in the host society and to the country of origin, is prominent in our analysis of the global Ethiopian diaspora. One of the most fundamental issues in the study of transnational Ethiopian

migration is that we must avoid confusing or conflating the physical existence of the Ethiopian diaspora and the systematic articulation of the idea of the Ethiopian diaspora. It is true that the Ethiopian diaspora has a long history and that Ethiopians have spread across the length and breadth of the world; but neither this history nor expansiveness by any means implies the emergence or articulation of a global Ethiopian diaspora or a global Ethiopian idea. Ethiopianist diaspora scholars need to identify whether there is a global idea of what it is to be Ethiopian (which probably requires a systematic exploration of Ethiopianism and its relations, if any, with the idea of a global Ethiopia) and define what this idea means and/or entails. Does this idea presuppose the existence of a common set of historical experiences shared by members of the Ethiopian diaspora? What is the political assumption of this idea: unity among Ethiopians in Ethiopia and in the diaspora?

Looking at the intersections of migration and identity, and particularly a diasporic identity, leads to a whole set of questions which, thus far, has remained unanswered by the existing literature. We first ask, “who is the diaspora?” and “what does it mean to be part of a diaspora—part of the Ethiopian diaspora to be more specific?” Asking these questions tries to access the existential conditions of diasporic populations. How does a diasporic population develop a collective consciousness? What factors (shared historical past, language, religion, socio-cultural and political organizations, etc.) contribute to this development? How do we understand diaspora consciousness? Does it entail socio-cultural identification or political organization or economic investments in the homeland? Does a longer stay and active engagement in the host country strengthen or weaken this consciousness? What is the nature and spectrum of any collective consciousness for the Ethiopian diaspora? Is it unified or fractured along the axes of ethnicity, class, religion, region, or gender? Is the diaspora a replica of the homeland (for instance in reflecting majority/minority divisions) or is it qualitatively different? Ultimately, who defines the essence and bounds of the Ethiopian diaspora?

We therefore seek to interrogate the complexity of the diaspora’s historical constitution and the dynamism of ideas and practices of belonging. We ask a set of interrelated questions to guide our analysis of identity through the migration experience: How united/divided is the Ethiopian diaspora? Can we talk about multiple Ethiopian diasporas, especially in light of current tensions of nation and national identity and the rise of multiple belongings? What do we do with people of Ethiopian descent who reject this national identity? Does external ascription or internal identification matter more in these instances? Such questions underscore the need to explore the link or lack thereof between diasporic identity formations and changing political conditions in home and host countries. Do second and third generations, and eventually fourth and fifth generations count as part of the Ethiopian diaspora? When do descendants start and stop being part of the diaspora and

become incorporated into their host societies? This eventually leads us to evaluate the role of host countries. Does diasporic collective consciousness exhibit regional differences? Is diasporic consciousness similar or different based on countries of settlement? What are the limits of transnational identity and diasporas? These are already quite a few questions to contend with as we interrogate the intersections of diaspora and identity.

Rethinking Ethiopian Migration and Diaspora Study: A Way Forward

There is an urgency to rethinking, even destabilizing, decades-old academic norms and intellectual paradigms with regard to the state of research on Ethiopian migration and diaspora. A restructuring of this emerging field is expected to open up new possibilities for new ways of thinking and analysis, new forms of insurgent and critical scholarship. Such an engagement needs to challenge existing modes of producing, organizing, and reproducing knowledge about transnational migration and diasporization. This requires addressing internal contradictions but also debunking assumptions that limit the work of Ethiopia's diaspora scholarship. Externally, a rethinking of existing scholarship entails the production of alternative methodologies that liberate but also enhance the study of the African diaspora and the production of knowledge thereon.

When examining a topic as expansive as migration, which touches upon every aspect of life, there is no alternative to using a multidisciplinary approach, employing concepts and methods developed in multiple disciplines. Literature, for example, becomes a useful resource that provides unmatched insight into the complexity and variety of human movements as well as their causes and consequences. Literature is particularly useful in portraying the conflicting emotions of migrant communities and those they leave behind. Literature, especially migrant literature, can provide insight into particular histories and the ways in which individuals and communities are transformed in the processes of migration and diasporization. Similarly, song lyrics can express nuanced views on the migration experience. The *tizeta* style, on remembrance, for instance, not uniquely attributed to migration, is unique in this regard (Getahun 2006).

Given our focus on Ethiopia, it is necessary to define the paradigms and parameters of Ethiopian migration and diaspora scholarship. To start with, this emerging field lacks temporal or chronological delineation. The Ethiopian diaspora therefore needs to be located in time. Although the focus of this book is the modern Ethiopian diaspora, producing a comprehensive understanding of the Ethiopian diaspora experience requires the study of both historical and contemporary migrations of Ethiopians, whether forced or voluntary, from

their homeland. The advantage of this new emphasis is both historical and historiographical. Historical refers to the production of new knowledge on the migration and diasporic experiences of Ethiopians in earlier centuries, whereas the historiographical is concerned with rectifying the imbalance in scholarship with its privileging of twentieth century and beyond.

Likewise, the geography of the Ethiopian diaspora is no less important than its chronology. Defining the geographical contours of the Ethiopian diaspora has the added benefit of correcting the traditional tendency to conflate the Ethiopian diaspora with North America and Europe. Instead, we expand our geographic scope to include areas that have hitherto been marginal to the study of the “global” Ethiopian diaspora, such as Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Liberating Ethiopian diaspora scholarship from its embeddedness in an approach that focuses on Euro-American diasporic experiences is imperative if the field is to offer conceptual and methodological alternatives to the epistemic dominance of Western diaspora studies.

Exploring an idea of global Ethiopia or defining the foundational markers of Ethiopian diaspora scholarship, however, should first begin by interrogating the Ethio-centricity of Ethiopian studies, Ethiopian diaspora studies in particular. This approach regards Ethiopia as a civilization distinct from the rest of Africa and of the world. Probing this narrative requires a fundamental shift away from the paradigm of Ethiopian singularity, the *raison d’être* of Ethiopian scholarship, to the notion of entanglement that captures Ethiopia’s complicated, often incoherent relationship with its neighbors and the world at large.

We can no longer see Ethiopia through a restrictive lens that insulates the country from the rest of the world. Rather, we need to excavate and underscore the ties that bind Ethiopia with the world, and other African countries in particular. This does not mean rejecting the specificity of the Ethiopian experience, which is evident in many arenas of the country’s social life, but underscoring the connections and encounters that align the Ethiopian experience with those of other areas of the world. Rethinking diaspora studies as such will open up new possibilities for a fruitful conversation about the nature of Ethiopia’s membership in the world, the role of transnational migration in its incorporation, and the making and unmaking of ideas and practices of national and transnational belongings, all in the context of shifting global dynamics and discourses.

Organization of the Book

The Global Ethiopian Diaspora: Migrations, Connections, and Belongings presents an interdisciplinary and comparative exploration of the experiences of the global Ethiopian diaspora. The volume consists of original

contributions by both junior and established scholars who build on earlier works on Ethiopian migration and the Ethiopian diaspora while also seeking to offer a fresher, newer, and more critical interrogation of Ethiopian migration and diasporic experiences. It maps out Ethiopian migration historically, geographically, and thematically, exploring the complexities involved in the creation of the modern Ethiopian diaspora. It interrogates its historical emergence, its geographic trajectories, its expanding streams, and its dynamic scope and pace. Employing a transdisciplinary approach, this volume provides a much needed historical and geographic context and depth to propose that we rethink Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies. While none of the contributions to this book seeks to quantify migration, the book as a whole makes a case for a plurality of disciplinary approaches and research methodologies to advance Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies. At the same time, this volume aims to challenge the existing boundaries of Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies and raise familiar yet important questions about belonging, connections, representation, ghettoization, and the perpetuation of inequalities. Furthermore, the book examines the future of Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies and identifies new avenues for expanding research.

This volume is divided into three main thematic areas, each with three to five chapters, to provide an encompassing exploration of Ethiopian migration and its diaspora. Part One, “Histories and Historiographies of Ethiopian Migration,” historicizes the complexity and dynamism of migration in Ethiopia and examines the scholarship produced over the last five or so decades on this important aspect of modern Ethiopian history. Mobility, a profoundly human condition, has been and still is a critical ingredient in the making of Ethiopia and the world at large, and accounting for this history is crucial. We recognize the role of the past in informing the nature of migration in the present. This first section explores the corpus of previous research on Ethiopian migration and diaspora, identifies its defining features, and suggests ways to enrich it while overcoming its limitations.

Amsale Alemu’s “Exhuming the Narrative: Imagining Prince Alemayehu in the Ethiopian Diaspora” uses the exile story of Prince Alemayehu, son of Emperor Tewodros II (1855–68), to grapple with modern Ethiopians’ complicated experiences of migration and displacement. Alemu asks whether the prince was a reward of imperial conquest, a refugee swept up in the tides of war, a prisoner of war, an exile, or an adoptee. All of this opens up possibilities for a critical examination of issues of representation, of both self and other, belonging, and displacement.

The second chapter, by Nassisse Solomon, titled “From ‘Lega Harar’ to Adowa to Haile Selassie: The Evocation of Popular and Contested Symbols of Ethiopian Topography, Culture, and History in Self-Representations of

Ethiopia and Ethiopians in Canada,” seeks to historicize, contextualize, and interpret Ethiopian migration to and settlement in Canada. At the same time, the essay explores the ways in which the narratives of Ethiopian immigrants living within the context of a global diaspora truly reflect how the intersection of individual and social dynamics determines how lives are lived. By exploring the lives of individual Ethiopian migrants, Solomon interrogates larger issues of nation, national identity, and ambivalent belongings while linking her analysis to seismic political and cultural shifts of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Alpha Abebe’s “Young Diasporans of Ethiopian Origin: A Historically Grounded Generation” adopts a fruitful conceptual framework termed “historically grounded generations” to argue that the large number of migrants who fled Ethiopia’s military junta (1974–91) shared a set of social and political circumstances and cultural influences that shaped their postmigration lived experiences. These shared experiences in Ethiopia itself molded their settlement patterns, social relations, diasporic identities, and engagements with their homeland. These phenomena, the argument goes, continue to affect the diasporic experiences of their children born and/or raised in North America as well as the nature of their engagements with the country of their parent’s origin. Abebe’s essay deals with the complicated condition of diasporaness and diasporic consciousness.

Part Two, “Geographies of Migration: Mapping the Global Ethiopian Diaspora,” examines the different geographies of Ethiopian migration and the settlement patterns of its diaspora, identifying key destinations and patterns of return. It does not set out to construct a simple cartography of migration, but instead analyses the issues, policies, decisions, trends, and processes—national and global in nature—that shape the roots and routes of migration.

Marina de Regt’s “Im/mobile Lives? Ethiopian Domestic Workers in the Middle East” questions the frameworks used in the analysis of Ethiopian female labor migration to the Middle East. She argues that the concept of “immobility” is a privileged framework reinforcing perspectives that regard women domestic workers who spend their lives in the houses of their employers as having little to no mobility or agency. De Regt argues instead that a study of gender and migration needs to shift to “mobility” as a new framework of analysis, while simultaneously disrupting the simplistic opposition between mobility and immobility.

Mulugeta F. Dinbabo’s chapter, “Ethiopian Diasporans in South Africa: Dynamics of Migration, Opportunities, and Challenges,” is a critical exploration of an internal Africa-based transnational migration, confirming the fact that most African migrants remain within the continent. Using the case of South Africa, the largest destination for sub-Saharan African migrants,

Dinbabo engages with issues of migration dynamics, integration, discrimination, diaspora community building, and home-host linkages.

Hewan Girma's "Ethiopians in Australia: Race, Ethnicity, and Othering" provides an overview of the Ethiopian diaspora in a less studied part of the world: Australia. While Ethiopians have a fairly recent history in Australia and their numbers are comparatively small, the ethnic bifurcations and the racialization processes they undergo in a white hegemonic society presents a number of interesting starting points for further research.

In their essay, "Ethiopian Irregular Migrants to Germany: Trajectory of Voyages and the Reality Gap in Expectations," Fitsum R. Teddla and Tesfaye Semela trace the audacious albeit irregular migration of young Ethiopians along a treacherous route to Germany, a country that has been receptive to migrants while witnessing a rise in violent antiimmigrant nativism. Using an aspiration/ability framework, the paper investigates why and how migrants are willing to sacrifice their lives to meet the goal of arriving in the West.

Tekalign Ayalew's chapter explores "Drivers and Patterns of Ethiopian Youth Migration to Global Destinations." In so doing, the chapter offers a broader framework for analyzing the common features of Ethiopian global migration while underscoring the specificities of each individual country-based experience. His discussions of structural, social, familial, and individual conditions of out-migrations demonstrate how these factors are shared across a wide range of migration experiences while generating multiple iterations under conditions of specific engagements. Ayalew employs the notions of hope and risk to frame his discussion of decisions to stay or migrate in the face of daunting circumstances.

Part Three, "Transnational Experiences: Connections, Disjuncture, and Ambivalent Belongings," undertakes a thematic examination of the transnational encounters and experiences of Ethiopian migration and the processes involved in the creation of the Ethiopian diaspora. It explores how immigrant communities navigate between two not so distinct spaces with which they are tied into dialogic encounters: on the one hand, their country of origin; and, on the other, the countries that are their destinations, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. Immigrants reject false oppositions between home/host and rejection/retention and instead develop encounters that transcend the binaries, expand their alternatives, and enrich their experiences of belonging. What is engendered in the process is a complicated and evolving politics of belonging in which immigrants become bifocal, speak more than one language, belong to more than one country, and express allegiance to multiple sources of affinities and affiliations (along the axes of religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality). At the same time, however, the ability to navigate these multiple and overlapping identities and affiliations

coexists with the everyday realities of disjuncture, suspension, ambivalence, in-betweenness, or even nowhere-ness.

Mary Goitom's "*Mahbereseb*: Traditional Community-Based Mechanisms and Responses that Support and Facilitate the Health and Well-Being of Ethiopian Immigrants in Canada" is a fascinating exploration of the ways in which communal structures and activities, such as the formation of institutions like *Maheber* and *Idir* that offer critical religious and social-cultural services, operate as systems of support that offset the mental health risk factors associated with migration and integration. Goitom shows how these multidimensional mechanisms organize well-being in a manner that navigates between home and host country by way of transnational social fields.

"The Ethiopian Diaspora's Philanthropy toward Homeland Development: Motivations, Patterns, and Prospects," by Elizabeth Chacko and Peter H. Gebre, uses the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for examining philanthropic giving from the US-based Ethiopian diaspora in support of social and economic development in Ethiopia. The paper describes the role of diasporans and diaspora associations in the development of their country of origin, the politics at home and in host countries that inform such interventions, and their future in a context of contested practices and performances of belonging.

Shimelis Bensa Gulema's "Interrogating Ethiopia: Diaspora, Social Media, and Partisan Discourses" uses social media discussions, from home and in the diaspora, to explore broader issues of nation, the national idea, and belonging but also questions of history, historicity, and politics in the age of intolerant nativism and contested globalization. Social media offers a lens through which one can engage with local and diasporic narratives that disrupt old assumptions while reifying political ideas and communities based on narrow and exclusivist understandings of identity. The essay argues that such debates should be seen as part of a broader, sometimes outraged conversation about being, becoming, and belonging in a nation and a world that are changing in ways that are simultaneously liberating and disempowering.

Hewan Girma's "Songs of *Sidet*: An Insight into Ethiopia's Culture of Migration through Song Lyrics Analysis" draws on a selection of Amharic song lyrics to examine the place of migration, both internal and transnational, in the cultural imagination of Ethiopian society. One of the essay's organizing questions is why, despite the growing size of Ethiopia's global diaspora and the corresponding importance of migration for many Ethiopian families, negative perceptions of migration persist. The author offers a nuanced analysis in which negative sentiments collide and coexist with a new sense of appreciation for migration and migrants.

Kassaye Berhanu-Mac Donald's chapter "Between Worlds: Ethiopian Adoptee Identity" considers an issue that has been peripheral in diaspora studies at large. The chapter investigates the history and politics of international adoption, its enduring psycho-social impact on families and adoptees, and the ambivalence of adoptee identity and engagement with Ethiopia. Using the term the "invisible diaspora," whose story and experience do not always fit the classic immigrant or second-generation narrative, the author delves into the adoptee's complicated sense of belonging, which involves the constant questioning of their membership in the host country and their attachment to Ethiopia, in essence their Ethiopianness. As such, her essay adds to our understanding of this new phenomenon and in so doing helps rectify a historiographical imbalance in scholarship on the Ethiopian diaspora.

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Part One

Histories and
Historiographies of
Ethiopian Migration

Chapter I

Exhuming the Narrative

Imagining Prince Alemayehu in the Ethiopian Diaspora

Amsale Alemu

Is it only a matter of unearthing that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed? Or is a quite different practice entailed—not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past?

Stuart Hall¹

Confronted with erasures and distortions of their past, Black diaspora communities seek to recuperate and retell collective histories in service of a shared present and legible future. However, as Stuart Hall posited in 1990, such recuperation is not a mere “unearthing,” but a recreation of history that produces and is produced by collective identity.² Diasporic identity does not stand apart from the signs and stories that seek to represent it but is formed by those very evocations of the past. This process is less concerned with a singular position of truth (though it may be corrective of common distortions) or a location of origin (though it may hold a real or imagined site of reference). Instead, diaspora rearchives history by dynamically engaging both its emotional resonances and extant power structures.

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- 1 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Stuart Hall: Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 224.
 - 2 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” *Framework* 36 (1989): 69.

An especially powerful genre of historical narrative employed to produce collective identity is biography. The story of a life can be made to represent a people or scaled down to the unit of the individual, in all its specificities and contexts. What then, must we do with the story of a life, in the words of poet Lemn Sissay, “that’s not happened”?³ What power exists in the biography of a child, for example, who has been made famous for historical occurrences not of his own doing? In the Ethiopian diaspora, one such life has long animated the imagination of writers and storytellers: Prince Alemayehu, son of Emperor Tewodros II (1855–68). Current debates about inter-country adoption, repatriation, and the diaspora’s terms for migration and displacement are negotiated across the worlds Alemayehu reached beyond his own volition.

In March 2019, the director of London’s National Army Museum handed two locks of Emperor Tewodros’s hair to Ethiopian Minister of Culture and Tourism, Hirut Kassaw.⁴ The hair was taken in the wake of the Battle of Maqdala (1868)—one of Britain’s most expensive military expeditions in the nineteenth century—along with over three hundred and fifty manuscripts, dozens of royal treasures, and the emperor’s son, Alemayehu. Returned to Ethiopia over one hundred and fifty years after they were taken at Maqdala, Tewodros’s hair was buried with the rest of the emperor’s cremated remains in Qwara Province.⁵

Two years earlier, as part of its National Children’s Policy, the Ethiopian government banned all inter-country adoptions of children born in Ethiopia.⁶ While this decision was made in the wake of several stories of the physical abuse and, in some cases, death of Ethiopian adoptees in North America and Europe, the new policy emphasized “identity crisis and other problems that will affect [adoptees] psychologically and socially.”⁷ In fact,

3 “Prince Alamayu,” *Great Lives*, BBC Radio 4, Series 29, Episode 3 of 9 (December 2012): 27:15–27:21.

4 Ethiopian Embassy to the United Kingdom, “Press Release,” March 21, 2019, <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/ethiopians-celebrate-historic-return-of-emperor-tewodros-hair/>.

5 Martin Bailey, “London’s National Army Museum to return emperor’s hair to Ethiopia,” *The Art Newspaper*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/london-s-national-army-museum-to-return-emperor-s-hair-to-ethiopia>.

6 US Department of State, “Ethiopia Adoption Notice: Latest Information Regarding Adoptions,” November 8, 2017, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/Intercountry-Adoption-News/ethiopia-adoption-notice-08nov2017.html>.

7 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, “National Children’s Policy” (Addis Ababa, April 2017).

the Amharic-language text specified the problem as one of being raised in an unfamiliar language, culture, and country.

This chapter argues that rather than being merely co-incident, there is a connection between the two events—the restitution of Tewodros’s organic material from the UK and Ethiopia sealing off a once wildly-popular country for child adoption to the international community—in the person of Alemayehu. Taken as a seven-year-old child in the aftermath of one of Britain’s most expensive military expeditions of the nineteenth century, brought into the care of the British state, and later enrolled in English public and military schools, Alemayehu existed in an uneasy state of liminality, as both an orphan and a national treasure. He is presently buried outside of St. George’s Chapel at Windsor Palace; the question of repatriating his physical remains has vacillated between a question of restoring stolen goods and returning a child displaced from his home and birthright.

The purpose of this chapter is to animate and nuance an especially potent narrative that Ethiopians have summoned in order to grapple with their experiences with migration and displacement. Alemayehu had a short but dizzying life that spanned three continents but lasted only eighteen years. He not only traversed vast geographic space, but also, in his lifetime, found himself forced into celebrity. As Cornelia Cotton, mother-in-law of Alemayehu’s first guardian, would write in her memoirs of hosting him:

Alamayu [*sic*] can scarcely be considered a private individual: rather must be regarded as somewhat of public property, and very natural and reasonable has been the desire expressed by many to know something of the little Abyssinian stranger, who came among us under such peculiar circumstances.⁸

The words and frameworks we use to discuss Alemayehu are driven by choices laden with conflicting motivations and politics. Was Alemayehu part of the spoils of war, another heritage item best housed under the custodianship of the British? Was he a refugee, swept up in the tides of war and brought under the generous guardianship of his caretakers? Was he a prisoner of war, or an exile? Most crucially, does Alemayehu mark the first instance in a legacy of Ethiopian diaspora, perhaps the “first Ethiopian

8 C. C., *Anecdotes of Alamayu, the late King Theodore’s son* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1870), 71. Note on spelling: Alemayehu’s name is represented by numerous historical attempts at English transliteration, and contemporary accounts who adopt these historical misspellings, including Alamayou, Alamayu, Alamayo, and Alemayoo. By this point, it is well known that a correct transliteration of Alemayehu’s name accounts for its literal Amharic translation (ዓለማየሁ, meaning “I saw the world”).

adoptee,” as several people have imagined?⁹ These various representations are of interest not only from a historical-ethnographic perspective; they have underwritten interrelated paths to Ethiopian diasporic self-expression. The most pervasive tropes in narratives of Alemayehu—found in both archival materials and contemporary accounts—either commend the charity of the British State and the triumph of British military force or describe Alemayehu as a prisoner of war, adoptee, or stolen treasure.

I argue that Alemayehu’s life story presents an opportunity to think through the relationship between adoption and repatriation of both people and goods. This is in no small part because the accepted narrative of his life—that he was the unfortunate result of an inevitable conflict who later benefitted from the charity of Victorian England—has been revised by Ethiopians and related to their own experiences of displacement. This chapter will therefore explore: tropes and narrative conventions from British accounts in the time of Alemayehu’s life; how these ideas influence contemporary accounts of the Battle of Maqdala; and how some Ethiopian writers and artists have worked with and against these tropes in pursuit of their own self-expression and historical restitution.

While at times, but not always, rejecting popular assurances that the British had provided Alemayehu with necessary refuge in the wake of an unavoidable war, these retellings systematize the prince’s life in a greater legacy of colonial history and claims for reparatory justice. Refusing to resign themselves to the idea of Alemayehu being a mere footnote in Britain’s cultural inventory, Ethiopians who identify with him have sought to restore him to a diaspora of living memory, a discursive restitution by narrating him into an imagined legacy of Ethiopian migrations. While this may not directly assure the return of Alemayehu’s physical remains to Ethiopia, these new narratives have real effects in the life outcomes of future children who may be faced with a most profound decision not of their choosing: how to retell their life experience in service of a collective identity they cannot *unearth* and *reclaim*, but can more effectively *produce*.

9 For example, see “Prince Alamayu,” BBC Radio 4, 8:35 and Maureen McCauley Evans, “Prince Alemayehu: The First Ethiopian Adoptee?,” December 27, 2014, <https://lightofdaystories.com/2014/12/27/prince-alemayehu-the-first-ethiopian-adoptee/>.

“I was a stranger, and ye took me in.”
On Pathos and Bravado¹⁰

With this often-cited line quoted above, the story of Alemayehu would seem to have been decisively told. It is, after all, the inscription on the plaque memorializing his death in St. George's Chapel. The plaque was commissioned by Queen Victoria, who could be said to have embodied the twinned emotions that characterized British perceptions of Alemayehu's life: sympathy and martial spirit. On the one hand, Victoria was known for taking a maternal interest in children and orphans, especially foreign children of royalty. Indeed, as one critic in *The Spectator* mused when Alemayehu died in 1879 at the age of eighteen, “we suspect it was the Maharajah Dhuleep Singh who unconsciously killed Prince Alamayu.”¹¹ A “Sikh Prince, caught young” had also become an “experiment of bringing colored Princes to England,” but in terms of longevity, was more successful.¹² The writer made a few attempts at explanation, speculating that Black African constitutions were intolerant to northern climates and civilization.

Queen Victoria did indeed take a personal liking to Alemayehu, discussing his personality and habits, and expressing concern for his wellbeing. Her most cited words about Alemayehu were written just after his death, a reflection on the tragedy of his life, as she saw it: “His was no happy life, full of difficulties of every kind, and he was so sensitive, thinking people stared at him on account of his color, that I fear he would never have been happy.”¹³ On the other side of her pity and sympathy, Queen Victoria was the forceful ruler on whose behalf the British edged out European competition to conquer Africa's people and territory. By the time of her death in 1901, Queen Victoria presided over an empire that constituted nearly a quarter of the world. Indeed, the two mutually reinforcing tendencies toward pathos and bravado embodied in Victoria and underlying British sentiments toward Alemayehu were inherent to *mission civilisatrice*, the rationale behind Britain's colonial ambitions.

10 Inscription on plaque commemorating Prince Alemayehu in St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. As even the plaque concedes (“near this spot lied buried . . .”), Alemayehu is not buried inside the chapel, but outside, near a rear entrance in a shared grave. That site is marked by an unmarked cross on a plinth.

11 Untitled, *The Spectator* 52 (2683), November 29, 1879.

12 Untitled, *The Spectator*.

13 Royal Collection Trust, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W), November 14, 1879 (Princess Beatrice's copies).

Charged with a two-pence increase on income taxes solely to fund the Maqdala expedition, the British public was told a compelling story of noble powers vanquishing the alcoholic and lunatic tyrant, Emperor Tewodros.¹⁴ These public narratives were replete with Shakespearean tropes of the “mad king” Macbeth felled by his own folly and paranoia. In the rendition offered by Roger Acton for the *Illustrated London News*, Tewodros was “this proud little King of dusky Ethiopia, who had fretted and strutted and flitted across the scene.”¹⁵ The less cathartic, but more precise truth was that Maqdala was more the result of a series of diplomatic blunders and lapses in communication, which resulted in Tewodros taking foreigners captive.¹⁶ The captives themselves stoked war fury by leaking sensational accounts to the press of their imprisonment in the mountain fortress of a “blood-thirsty despot.”¹⁷ It was to the British forces’ great surprise, as described in Darrell Bates’s seminal *Abyssinian Difficulty*, when they finally found Tewodros’s captives, to see that they were not in rags, but “sleek, well-nourished, and well-dressed.”¹⁸ They “experienced a sense of disappointment and anti-climax” at the army-commissioned rations they shared with their liberators, having grown accustomed to the “well organized and well-servanted style of living” afforded them by their captor.¹⁹

14 Or, as Acton would describe Tewodros, “in one of his fits of madness when the Satanic pride of his unruly soul was further inflamed by the cursed abuse of drink.” Roger Acton, *The Abyssinian Expedition and the life and reign of King Theodore with one hundred illustrations engraved from the original sketches by the special artists and correspondents of the Illustrated London News* (London: Office of the Illustrated London News, 1868), 50.

15 Acton, *The Abyssinian Expedition*, 74.

16 Other factors in the lead-up to the Battle of Maqdala included tensions between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Catholic (particularly Jesuit) and Protestant missionaries and growing perceived threats on the part of Tewodros from Egypt and the Sudan, all of which motivated the emperor to make overtures to the British in the first place. Tewodros’s requests to Victoria, for a variety of reasons that included British dismissal and technical administrative errors, would receive no reply. See Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 35–39. For more on the policy of the British Foreign Office in this context, see Volker Matthies, *The Siege of Magdala: The British Empire against the Emperor of Ethiopia* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2012).

17 Acton, *The Abyssinian Expedition*, 74.

18 Darrell Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty: The Emperor Theodoros and the Magdala campaign, 1867–68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 189.

19 Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty*, 189; As Bates also notes, a photograph of the captives that was taken after the fact showed them posing with iron shackles, wearing dirtied faces, worn sport coats, and forlorn expressions. Though

While such observations proved inconvenient to the story of Britain's unmitigated victory, the British public still wanted to know what their tax money had *accomplished*. In the narrative sequel to the events of battle, Alemayehu would serve as a living testament to British success in war, and hopefully a proof of concept of English generosity and superior upbringing. Anyone with any connection to Alemayehu put pen to paper, out of national interest. Among them was the mother-in-law of the prince's first guardian, Cornelia Cotton, who hosted Alemayehu for six months at Freshwater in Isle of Wight.²⁰ Cotton described Alemayehu's rudimentary Christianity, his humble yet pure moral disposition. She remembers giving him an illustrated Bible, which was the only book to captivate his interest. In her description, Alemayehu was not merely her guest, but a signifier of greater, seemingly cosmic, forces at work offering Britain the opportunity to redeem a timid soul from a strange land. Maintaining the conceit of colonial uplift, Cotton noticed Alemayehu's progress with a pang of reluctance: "But he had a strange way often of expressing his ideas, which was at once graphic and pretty; indeed, we often rather lamented his increasing knowledge of English, as making these peculiar and most interesting modes of speech less frequent."²¹ Her desire to make an example of Alemayehu's edification and salvation was counter-balanced by a fascination with the "peculiar," diminished vestiges of his so-called native origins.²²

The very presumption that Alemayehu would be made into a presentation of English status and education—perhaps rising to the ranks of a colonial officer in India, as was once imagined—meant that his advancement under the protection of the British state induced both sympathy and pride. Cast in this way, Alemayehu constituted one of the rightfully earned treasures of battle. No source better attests to this trope than the series of photographs taken by Julia Margaret Cameron upon Alemayehu's arrival in England, on one of his visits to Queen Victoria's Osborne House. The most often cited of these images depicts Alemayehu seated listlessly in the lap of his guardian,

evoked as evidence of the prisoners' conditions, this image should be read more as a keepsake for the captives' sake, a memento giving clearer testimony to how they desired to be imagined in their dramatic plight.

20 The identity of "C.C." who authored *Anecdotes of Alamayhu* is certainly Cornelia Cotton, who is sometimes confused with Captain Speedy's wife, who was also called Cornelia Cotton after her mother. However, we know the author was Speedy's mother-in-law because she mentions having to be separated from Alemayehu when he left with Speedy and Speedy's wife for India: "very sad did we all feel as the time drew near for Alamayhu to leave us" (Cotton, *Anecdotes of Alamayhu*, 63).

21 Cotton, *Anecdotes of Alamayhu*, 54.

22 Cotton, *Anecdotes of Alamayhu*, 54.

Captain Speedy, surrounded by “Ethiopian treasures.” Speedy himself holds a shield, horn, and spear, looking stoically in profile. Speedy, who prided himself in knowing Amharic and having once been offered the role of military consultant to Tewodros six years before Maqdala, was said to strike a heart-wrenching figure beside Alemayehu.²³ Over six feet tall, with a predilection to wearing “Abyssinian clothes,” the man next to the “tiny little black child” struck the picture of English strength and compassion.²⁴ In Speedy’s lap, Alemayehu figured as the mute and mutable protégé and rightful possession of the British crown. In the same photo series, however, another picture shows Speedy without Alemayehu, in the position of bravado that lurked in the shadow of pathos. His face, stern and focused, stares down a Black man named Casa; Speedy aims a spear into his cowering, supine opponent. We do not know the origins of “Casa,” as described in Cameron’s notes, for he was never mentioned in the list of Ethiopians taken from Maqdala on the ship *Feroze*, to England.²⁵

Scholars like Yemane Demissie and Jeff Rosen have rightly compared this image with a popular *Punch* cartoon from 1867 depicting the battle between Victoria and Tewodros—England and Abyssinia.²⁶ A stylized, white-skinned woman in sandals and billowing robes—evoking a Greco-Roman romantic appeal to Western civilization—pins a craven, monstrously depicted, and supposedly African king against a wall.²⁷ Her spear touches his chest, as he stares with mouth agape, features exaggerated, wearing a misshapen feathered crown. Invested in this racist depiction was both Britain’s desire to be seen as more beautiful—an embodiment of justice—and stronger—the sign of vitality—than its deranged foe. Wise and just England, in this figuration,

23 Richard Pankhurst, “Captain Speedy’s ‘Entertainment’: The Reminiscences of a Nineteenth Century British Traveller to Ethiopia,” *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale di Studi e Documentazione dell’Istituto Italo-Africano* 38, no. 3 (1983): 428–48.

24 From Cornelia Cotton’s description, see *Anecdotes of Alamayu*, 33.

25 It also cannot be merely coincident that Casa might be an English variant of Kassa, Tewodros’s birth name.

26 Yemane Demissie, “Bust Brawl: The Battle over a Black Bronze Prince,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 38/39 (2016): 174–80; Jeff Rosen, “Cameron’s Photographic Double Takes,” in *Orientalism Transposed: The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture*, ed. Julie Codell and Dianne Sachko Macleod (London: Ashgate, 1998), 158–86; Jeff Rosen, “Overstone’s ‘Negromania’: Justness and Justice at Home and Abroad,” in *Julia Margaret Cameron’s ‘fancy subjects’: Photographic Allegories of Victorian Identity and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 196–229.

27 “The Abyssinian Question. Britannia. ‘Now, then, King Theodore! How about those prisoners?’” *Punch*, August 10, 1867.

had no choice but to intervene militarily, and with noble reluctance freed the desperate captives held in the hands of a wretched Abyssinian king.

This story would have been troubled, had the public known that Tewodros's death and Alemayehu's capture were neither inevitable, nor intended. Commander of the Maqdala Expedition, Robert Napier, had received official order solely to liberate the captives. Instead, he improvised. As Napier himself explained in the official report, he felt "impelled" to demand that Tewodros "submit himself to Her Majesty the Queen."²⁸ To Napier, "it was essential for the vindication of our national honour, which he has so grossly insulted, that he should be removed for ever from his place."²⁹ Driven by resentment for Tewodros's tenacity in the face of his enemy's forces, Napier demanded that the emperor surrender himself personally to the queen. By that point, no amount of diplomatic intervention or offerings on Tewodros's part, which he attempted, would move Napier to compromise.³⁰ Anticipating his fate were he remanded to England—*Punch* commentators snidely suggested that the emperor be exhibited in a human zoo—Tewodros shot himself inside his fortress walls.³¹ It is said that Tewodros, and later Alemayehu's mother, Queen Tirunesh, wished for Alemayehu to go to England for safety and an education. This story, however, is inconclusive, because Tirunesh would die en route from Maqdala of pleurisy. In light of Alemayehu's fate, what is in fact clear is that, by annihilating himself with the pistol previously given him by Queen Victoria herself, Emperor Tewodros had surrendered himself to a double destruction of the self as ruler and father.³²

When Alemayehu died at an unusually young age, some observers spoke of dark forces the boy imagined had plagued him throughout his life. Since he died of lung failure, some attributed his death to inherited pleurisy from his mother. Still others explained Alemayehu's death as the impossible mix of Eastern blood with Western environment, echoing ethnological accounts

28 T. J. Holland and H. M. Hozier, "Record of the expedition to Abyssinia, comp. by order of the Secretary of State for War, Vol. II" (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1870), 444.

29 Holland and Hozier, "Record of the expedition to Abyssinia," 444.

30 As Napier also would write, "By our order, Magdala was burned, and left a blackened rock, as a warning to all who injure subjects of Her Majesty the Queen of England" (Holland and Hozier, "Record of the expedition to Abyssinia," 451).

31 "First catch your Negus, of course; but having caught him, bring him away and constitute him an exhibition. . . . After having been shown in London as long as he continued to be sufficiently attractive, he might be conveyed throughout the rest of the United Kingdom." "An Abyssinian Exhibition," *Punch*, May 2, 1868.

32 Holland and Hozier, "Record of the expedition to Abyssinia," 48.

from the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries that posited the origin of race and character in a combination of climate and topography. For example, after some time spent in India and Malaysia following Speedy's military reassignments, Alemayehu was brought back to England by an intervention of the Treasury Department to attend school. In preparation for his arrival, the Treasury insisted that Alemayehu be given both a medical examination and a character test, to form an "opinion on him morally, physically and intellectually, and report the best course for his ultimate welfare."³³ This followed speculation in some personal letters about the possibility that an Eastern climate had already ruined both his health and character.³⁴

While less convinced of dismissive explanations of Alemayehu's death being a mere impossible mixture of hot and cold bodily constitutions, one thing contemporary non-Ethiopian renditions of Alemayehu's life share with historical British accounts is a focus on the mysterious broodings and nearly mystical forces that could have driven the prince to his untimely death. Elizabeth Laird's *The Prince Who Walked with Lions* (2012), a novel based on Alemayehu's life, runs generally true to the events of his history as known, but still makes a telling conjecture to explain what killed Alemayehu. In Laird's account, happening upon a traveling menagerie, Alemayehu is so moved by the site of a lion that he curls up next to the beast, falling into a trance, awaking the next morning to his guardians rushing him home, where he falls ill from the night spent outside. With the lion, Alemayehu feels refreshingly at ease, whispering, "we're both far from home, you and I."³⁵ He then describes feeling "[the lion's] loneliness enter [his] soul."³⁶ Taking the lion, a symbol of the Ethiopian crown, literally, Laird supposes an innate connection between Alemayehu and the animal that risks literalizing Alemayehu as a lion, more akin to beast than person. Even if Alemayehu was conceivably homesick for the sight and smell of lions in the royal court, the episode veers dangerously close to racist depictions of Tewodros as an actual lion, and contemporaneous jokes of parading him in a human zoo.

Laird is not alone in finding the zoo—its animal and human varieties—to be a space for contemplating and imagining Alemayehu's conscious self. A recent, award-winning novel by David Rocklin takes more imaginative

33 Between the Treasury and Captain Speedy, in 1871–72 regarding Prince Alamayu, ff. 171, 177 Abyssinia: Memoranda rel. to T. C. S. Speedy's guardianship of Prince Alamayu (1872), Manuscripts Division, The British Library: Add MS 44618.

34 "Education of Prince Alamayo (Abyssinia)," 8th Duke of Argyll Papers (Ref.L.95/54), India Office Records and Private Papers, The British Library: IOR Neg 4247/8.

35 Elizabeth Laird, *The Prince Who Walked with Lions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 384.

36 Laird, *The Prince Who Walked with Lions*, 384.

leaps with Alemayehu's life. *The Night Language* (2017) poses the question: what if Alemayehu did not die at age eighteen, and instead lived a life long enough to provide testimony to his desires and fears from that time? To do that, Rocklin gives Alemayehu a lover, a Black medical attendant who is commissioned to be his guardian (in lieu of Captain Speedy, who is never mentioned). Philip and Alemayehu share a bond being the only Black people on board the ship to England ("we're two black monsters, not fit for anything but fires and oceans").³⁷ In an act of profound selflessness when Alemayehu is charged with sodomy and war crimes by the British and ordered to return to Ethiopia to his assured destruction in the hands of spiteful "tribal courts," Philip secretly takes his place.³⁸ He manages to pass for the prince in Ethiopia while Alemayehu escapes, free to pursue a life in Paris with summers painting on the Riviera. Only by reuniting with a dying Queen Victoria, whom Alemayehu sees grieving his assumed death as she attends the human zoo exhibit at the Paris World's Fair, is Alemayehu able to find "home" in a language he truly knows, the language of love and loss he shares with the queen. Rocklin re-imagines Alemayehu/Philip's plaque at St. George's Chapel as reading: "He was a stranger no more."³⁹ While perhaps well-intentioned, even moving at moments, *The Night Language* is an array of fantasies founded on disastrous assumptions. As Rocklin imagines Alemayehu thinking, with no apparent irony: "There's no stronger cage for a Negro . . . than the white man's imaginings of him."⁴⁰

"Visions Reflected on the Mirror of Our Past:" Situating Alemayehu in the Ethiopian Diaspora⁴¹

Many contemporary Ethiopian writers and filmmakers have been captivated by the story of Alemayehu. Some have re-figured him as kidnapped, one of the items stolen from Maqdala; others represent him as part of a global refugee movement or prefer to frame him in the debate surrounding inter-country adoption; still others recuperate him into the diaspora of the present. The following section of this chapter will explore three contemporary examples: an essay by writer Maaza Mengiste; a play by poet Lemn Sissay;

37 David Rocklin, *The Night Language* (Los Angeles: Rare Bird Books, 2017), 62.

38 Rocklin, *The Night Language*, 531.

39 Rocklin, *The Night Language*, 192.

40 Rocklin, *The Night Language*, 28.

41 Tsegaye Gebre Medhin, "Many a Cold Season" (1965), cited in Tewodros Bogale, "Major Themes in Ethiopian Poetry in English from 1944–1967 E.C." (M.A. diss., Addis Ababa University, 2002).

and a film by Afro-futurist artist Selam Bekele. Two primary motivations characterize these presentations of Alemayehu: one, a drive for restitution or return; and another, negotiating his place from the vantage of his physical distance from Ethiopia.⁴² These two interrelated forces, the centripetal and the centrifugal, highlight the conflicting relationship between national and diasporic identity.

From the immediate aftermath of Maqdala to the present, the Ethiopian government stakeholders as early as the reign of Emperor Yohannes (1872–89) have made repeated appeals to the British to return the looted items. Maqdala was just one of numerous instances of cultural theft from Ethiopia, including the Axumite obelisks that were taken by Italy, sacred materials regularly looted from religious and archaeological sites, and even a patent for teff flour, a pillar of Ethiopian cuisine, the intellectual property for which the Netherlands had attempted to own.⁴³ In 2019, a Dutch national born in Ethiopia, Sirak Asfaw, restored a liturgical crown stolen from a church in Cheleqot, in Tigray province, that he had found in the suitcase of a houseguest and which he had held in his personal possession for twenty-one years, unsure of whom to contact to ensure the item's rightful return.⁴⁴

The past hundred and fifty years have witnessed varying degrees of success in the effort to restore the Maqdala treasures. Certain pieces have been returned by individuals (including Robert Napier's descendants) or by the state in the form of diplomatic gift-giving. Haile Selassie (1930–74), before and during his rule, received a silver crown from George V and cap and seal from Elizabeth II in 1924 and 1965, respectively.⁴⁵ Both gifts to the

42 For further reading on the context of decolonization and the return of stolen cultural objects, see Jos van Beurden, "Decolonisation and Colonial Collections: An Unresolved Conflict," *Low Countries Historical Review* 133, no. 2 (2018): 66–78. For context on the case for Ethiopia's stelae, see Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopia, the Aksum Obelisk, and the Return of Africa's Cultural Heritage," *African Affairs* 98 (391) (1999): 229–39.

43 "Obelisk returned to Ethiopia after 68 years," *The Guardian*, April 20, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/20/italy.ethiopia>; UNESCO Office in Nairobi, "Ethiopia ratifies the UNESCO 1970 Convention to reinforce its fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property," November 29, 2017, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/member-states/single-view/news/ethiopia_ratifies_the_unesco_1970_convntion_to_reinforce_it/; Abdi Latif Dahir, "Ethiopia's teff flour is no longer patented as a Dutch invention," *Quartz Africa*, February 7, 2019, <https://qz.com/africa/1545111/ethiopias-teff-flour-is-no-longer-patented-as-a-dutch-invention/>.

44 Nina Siegal, "Looted Ethiopian Crown Resurfaces in the Netherlands," *The New York Times*, October 3, 2019.

45 Ethiopian Embassy to the United Kingdom, "150th Anniversary of the Battle of Maqdala Commemorated in

emperor, however, were less a restitution and more a symbolic confirmation of the relationship of goodwill Haile Selassie had actively cultivated with the British, particularly at the onset and aftermath of the Italo-Ethiopian War. Transnational organizations like AFROMET, founded by historian Richard Pankhurst in 1999, carried the cause through the beginning of the twenty-first century. A highlight in AFROMET's efforts came a few years later, when UK Chair Rev. John McLuckie accidentally found a tabot in his church in Edinburgh. Recognizing it as "an object of great significance and holiness," McLuckie successfully advocated for its return to Ethiopia in 2002.⁴⁶ By that point, the appeals for returning the treasures taken from Maqdala had focused on the tabots and manuscripts, royal possessions and precious objects, and less on Alemayehu's physical remains. While sometimes alluded to in order to highlight the severity of the case for Maqdala, Alemayehu was not yet completely constituted into the inventory of goods to which Ethiopia could claim rightful return.

This would change in 2007 with arrival of the Ethiopian millennium. With renewed appeals from the Ethiopian government, President Girma Woldegiorgis formally evoked Alemayehu's restitution as a means of restoring both wealth and history at the mark of a new Ethiopian calendrical era. As a member of the organizing committee for the millennium project told the press, Alemayehu "was a prisoner of war"; his return therefore signified a profound completion at the start of a new millennium.⁴⁷ Around this time, the Ethiopian diaspora in the UK also made public appeals. Most famously, a nine-year-old from North London, Gabriel Kassayie, submitted a petition to Prime Minister Tony Blair, signed by hundreds of his schoolmates and community members. The letter requested that the British government take the Ethiopian millennium as an opportunity to return the Maqdala artifacts, including Alemayehu's remains.⁴⁸ These requests were lobbed between various government departments, and ultimately refused.

A decade later, London would again return to the question of Maqdala, marking historical memory not by the Ethiopian millennium, but by the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Western date of the battle. In 2018, the Victoria and Albert Museum staged an exhibition, *Maqdala 1868*, that would pick up the new argument promulgated by the Ethiopian government and diaspora, that Alemayehu was unquestionably part of the Maqdala

London," April 16, 2018, <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/150th-anniversary-of-the-battle-of-maqdala-commemorated-in-london/>.

46 "Ethiopian artefact returning home," BBC News, January 27, 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/1783325.stm.

47 Cahal Milmo and Emily Duggan, "Out of Africa: The stolen prince," *The Independent*, June 18, 2007.

48 Gail Warden, "Ethiopia Wants Its Prince Back," *New African* 465 (Aug/Sep 2007).

plunder, and not merely a ward of the British state. The museum displayed all of the treasures in their possession and, controversially, included images of Alemayehu himself alongside manuscripts, clothing, and gold pieces. V&A Director Tristram Hunt celebrated the event as “organized in consultation with the Ethiopian community here in London,” emphasizing the museum’s responsibility to educate the (British) public about the origins of these items.⁴⁹ However, the standing refusal of the British government flew in the face of the V&A’s goodwill efforts. Tristram Hunt’s offer to send the Maqdala objects to Ethiopia on a long-term loan basis was received with skepticism, revealing the Director’s assumption that the V&A was a more capable institution to steward Ethiopia’s artifacts.⁵⁰ Today, most of the Maqdala objects at the V&A are kept in storage, with the exception of a vitrine housing Emperor Tewodros’s gold crown and chalice. The object labels make a point of including the Ge’ez terms “ክሊል” and “ጽዋ” below the English translations “crown” and “chalice,” perhaps as a show of cultural competency, a mark of the institution’s fitness to house the materials.

By exhibiting Alemayehu’s portraits in 2018, *Maqdala 1868* reinscribed an argument in the repatriation debate initiated by Ethiopian critics a decade earlier: that Alemayehu was taken in an act of war. Even if British sources insisted that Alemayehu’s parents had communicated their wish for the prince to be taken to England, the boy was a part of the pillage. His remains, then, buried outside St. George’s chapel, were just as much items in the inventory of stolen materials as the objects presented behind reinforced glass in the V&A.

Writer Maaza Mengiste epitomizes this line of thinking in a 2015 article for *The Guardian*, “This Ethiopian prince was kidnapped by Britain—now it must release him.” Anticipating the V&A exhibition that would affirm this argument, she writes: “[Alemayehu] has become, like the sacred and valuable objects still in British museums and libraries, a possession.”⁵¹ As part of the inventory of stolen materials, Alemayehu’s return becomes, under Mengiste’s pen, both a homeward journey and a return of trafficked loot. In

49 Tristram Hunt, “Maqdala 1868,” V&A Blog, April 4, 2018, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/museum-life/maqdala-1868>.

50 Mark Brown, “Looted Ethiopian treasures in UK could be returned on loan,” *The Guardian*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/apr/03/looted-ethiopian-treasures-in-uk-return-loan-victoria-albert-museum>.

51 Maaza Mengiste, “This Ethiopian prince was kidnapped by Britain—now it must release him,” *The Guardian*, September 7, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/07/britain-kidnapped-ethiopian-prince#comment-58977703>. A brief look at the public comments section (including a remark by Lemn Sissay) gives a sense of the polarizing nature of this debate.

her conception, Alemayehu shares a connective bond not with zoo animals, but with the materials taken from Maqdala, with which he shared a boat ride to England. As Mengiste enjoins us to imagine:

You see him look longingly at these mementos from home, now imprisoned behind glass. You see him, stoic, as he is guided from one vitrine to the other. You see his steps slow and falter as he approaches a beautiful long dress. You imagine that in that instant he wants to smash his fist through the glass and take back his mother's dress, bury himself in her familiar scent. Instead, he turns to the queen and demands again to be sent home.⁵²

Maaza Mengiste ties the effort to repatriate the Maqdala treasures with the restoration of Alemayehu himself by both anthropomorphizing the objects imprisoned in glass vitrines and making the return of Alemayehu's physical remains a possibility for the homeward return of his psychic self. This powerful figuration of Alemayehu is a longstanding argument in the renewed fight for returning the treasures from Maqdala, but one of many different ways the Ethiopian diaspora has imagined and interpreted Alemayehu's life.

Poet Lemn Sissay has described feeling personal resonances with Alemayehu's life circumstances. Lemn Sissay's mother, while studying in London, put her son in foster care after she was told she could do so on a temporary basis. Soon after, Sissay was made a ward of the British state and only learned of the deception—that his mother had intended to come back for her son but was barred from seeing him again—until much later in his life. Like Alemayehu's name, ("I saw the world") Lemn Sissay's name is ironic and significant. Originally given the same name of his social worker, Norman, Sissay only learned of his birthname, "Lemn"—meaning simply "Why" in Amharic—after finding his original birth certificate.⁵³ Offering another parallel to Alemayehu, Sissay produced a show that would be performed only once in 2017. In the show, simply called "The Report," Sissay stages a live reaction to the social services psychological report detailing his abuses as a child in the care of the state, a document that, in its haunting detail of Sissay's physical and emotional afflictions, echoes the pointed observations made about Alemayehu by his caretakers in his lifetime.⁵⁴ Carrying these personal resonances more explicitly, Lemn Sissay chose to feature the life of Alemayehu in a 2012 episode of the BBC series, "Great Lives." During a discussion of the likelihood that Alemayehu had been merely

52 Mengiste, "This Ethiopian prince was kidnapped by Britain."

53 For more background on Lemn Sissay's biography, see his memoir, *My Name Is Why* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2019).

54 Simon Hattenstone, "'I was dehumanised': Lemn Sissay on hearing his harrowing abuse report live on stage," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/02/i-was-dehumanised-lemn-sissay-on-hearing-his-harrowing-abuse-report-live-on-stage>.

“handed over” to the British forces by his parents, Sissay seemed skeptical. He pointed to international adoption cases: “If you can write a narrative that you are saving a child, then you can take them anywhere. There are many ways that the child could have been saved . . . taking the child, it just doesn’t fit right. You go to war . . . the father kills himself, and then says please let my enemies take my child.”⁵⁵ In the BBC program, the discussion moved on, leaving this crucial point unaddressed.

A year after the “Great Lives” episode, Sissay was presented with another opportunity to give expression to Alemayehu’s life, this time more interpretively. When Benjamin Zephaniah announced his desire to adopt his novel, *Refugee Boy*, for the stage, the author remembered Lemn Sissay calling him and insisting, “this is my story, Benjamin. I’ve got to do this. It’s so close to my experience.”⁵⁶ Zephaniah, an author most known for his poetry, used prose to document the life of a child, called Alem. In the novel, Alem is sent to the UK seeking safety in the midst of the Ethiopia-Eritrean border war, as his family of mixed Eritrean and Ethiopian identity are swept up in the conflict and persecuted. With the help of new friends in London, Alem stages a campaign for his asylum, but at great cost. His mother dies before she can leave for the UK, and his father dies by the hand of a political agent who has infiltrated a pro-unity organization called EAST, a faction threatened by the growing popularity of the “Let Alem Stay” campaign.

Benjamin Zephaniah’s novel is not based on the life of Alemayehu Tewodros; instead, it represents the lives of Million and Dereje Hailemariam, who were both denied asylum in the UK.⁵⁷ When Lemn Sissay adapted the novel to the stage in 2013, however, he brought his own story, and the story that has long resonated with him, to the script. While following the plot of *Refugee Boy* closely, the play makes one important deviation. The EAST agent who kills Alem’s father for his son “gaining too much attention” is given a name: Tewodros.⁵⁸ Playing on the slippage between Alem and Alemayehu, Lemn Sissay has Tewodros kill Alem’s father, which parallels Alemayehu’s father, Tewodros, taking his own life. If Tewodros is refigured as the EAST agent, Sissay is evoking both the trauma of Alemayehu’s capture and the complex political forces that led to his father’s defeat. For, in the end, the siege of Maqdala could not have been possible without the collaboration of local provincial leaders who rivaled Tewodros and sought to overthrow the emperor, even if they could not have predicted that the British would

55 “Prince Alamayu,” BBC Radio 4, 8:35–9:11.

56 Ian Youngs, “Benjamin Zephaniah’s *Refugee Boy* Steps on Stage,” BBC News, March 14, 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-21753181>.

57 Benjamin Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 7.

58 Zephaniah, *Refugee Boy*, 54, 56.

go so far as to destroy the Maqdala fortress itself.⁵⁹ At the end of the play, devastated over the death of his father, Alem has a conversation with his father's spirit: "The North Star decided he would always shine because he is more powerful than the rest . . . Okay. Can I come? Please. Please. Can I? Can I?"⁶⁰ Alem/Alemayehu's eventual return is processual, incremental, and probably unachievable. Restituting the adoptee's life to the country and communities from which they were sent becomes as asymptotic as reaching for the North Star. Yet, as Sissay addresses Alem in his introduction to the play in a moment of authorial empathy, "Reach for the stars Alem because darkness surrounds you."⁶¹

If one line of discourse presents Alemayehu as "the spoils of war" in the wake of Maqdala, and another depicts him as a refugee with complicated, ultimately unresolved ties to home, Selam Bekele pursues a third approach that focuses on Alemayehu's location in an evoked Ethiopian diaspora, even after his death. Selam Bekele, who identifies as an Afro-futurist artist, created a film in 2014 as part of her aptly named Tzta collection (abbreviated transliteration of "memory"), called "Prince of Nowhere."⁶² In it, she stages an imagined interview with Alemayehu, where she asks "about his feelings of being away from his family and country."⁶³ Less focused on the circumstances and more interested in the afterlives of transnational dislocation, Bekele says in an interview for *Tadias* magazine that "Prince of Nowhere" is "mostly a conversation about displacement and how we continue to survive when we are away from home."⁶⁴ Bekele expresses an intention "to connect [Alemayehu's] story with the similarity of stories from the Diaspora today in regards to migration, relocation and adapting to a new society while maintaining our ties to our culture and history."⁶⁵ Her evocation of Alemayehu slips between exposition and memoir, as the retelling

59 See Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976) and Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001).

60 Lemn Sissay, *Refugee Boy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 57.

61 Sissay, *Refugee Boy*, ii.

62 Tizita is actually more complicated term, being an act of memory, a poetic genre, and a musical expression. For a more detailed discussion, see Dagmawi Woubshet, "Tizita: A New World Interpretation," *Callaloo* 32, no. 2 (2009): 629–34.

63 "Interview with Selam Bekele: Oakland's Home Away from Home Art Project," *Tadias*, September 16, 2014, <http://www.tadias.com/09/16/2014/interview-with-selam-bekele-oaklands-home-away-from-home-art-project/>.

64 "Interview with Selam Bekele."

65 "Interview with Selam Bekele." Note congruences with her most recent work on narrative nonlinearity. See <https://www.selam.studio/>.

of the prince's life by imagining his own testimony becomes a channel for Bekele to meditate on her own life and diasporic position. In the poster that accompanied the screening of "Prince of Nowhere" in Oakland, California, Bekele uses collage to express both the historic and the simultaneous resonances she finds in Alemayehu's life. An image brought from the archive (a photograph of Alemayehu by an unknown photographer, a less-often used portrait of him staring directly, perhaps contentedly, into the camera, wearing a black velvet jacket) is layered with handwritten notes to herself (snippets include "keep quiet and go" and "driverless cars"), an embodied act of both salvage and reinvention endemic to reclaiming diasporic identity.⁶⁶ This process comes with mixed emotions, as Bekele herself gestures to in the ironic meaning of Alemayehu's name. Having "seen the world" only in the context of forced capture, Alemayehu represents an identifiable ambivalence between the breadth of lives lived across continents and the feeling of "nowhere-ness" created in the translocation. Alemayehu's life can serve as a totem in historical time to moor and affirm the continued struggles of those still negotiating with a home that exceeds place, at the same time loosening static narratives of *going* or *coming* in pursuit of *communing*.

Speculating the Black Diasporic Figure

As soon as I *desire*, I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else.

Frantz Fanon⁶⁷

Recruiting Alemayehu's story in service of imagining Ethiopian diaspora is not without its problems of definition. If an adoptee, Alemayehu could be said to have experienced a "thrownness," a term used by Barbara Yngvesson to describe the moment when an adopted child recognizes the possibility of coming from a point of origin outside their family environment.⁶⁸ By virtue of his racial, linguistic, cultural, and environmental contrasts with England, Alemayehu could—and did—attest to feeling out of place, or a sense of "not-me." However, in Yngvesson's framework, Alemayehu could never

66 The Afrofuturist Affair, "Black Holographic Memory Spotlight On: Selam Bekele," 2015, <https://afrofuturistaffair.tumblr.com/post/101538143865>.

67 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lamm Markman (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 218.

68 Barbara Yngvesson, "Going 'Home': Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots," *Social Text* 21, no. 1 (2003): 7.

feel the complete “loss of bearings” in discovering himself “both familiar and strange” without having made a physical return to his site of birth; for him to achieve a meta understanding of his condition of circulation would require that he journey back to Ethiopia and regard himself as being other-than-other, estranged from his place of birth.⁶⁹

If Alemayehu were a prisoner of war—a subset of political exile—he could be one in an archive of African life stories. Exile itself, as Nathan Riley proposes, should be seen less as exceptional, romantic, or identity-erasing, and instead constitutive of a continuum of transnational African movements throughout history.⁷⁰ However, being a child, Alemayehu did not have the same agency as others similarly held captive by forces of religious, political, or social change.⁷¹

Lastly, if a refugee of war, Alemayehu could be made exemplary of contemporary profiles in migration, individuals and families compelled to seek haven in new nations. However, Alemayehu was singular in having to contend with the highest powers of his country of arrival. Queen Victoria herself sought to (re-)make the boy as a reflection of Great Britain’s cultural and civilizational self-perception. Indeed, some uses of Alemayehu’s image, like

69 Barbara Yngvesson, “The Child Who Was Left Behind: ‘Dynamic temporality’ and Interpretations of History in Transnational Adoption,” *Childhood* 20, no. 3 (2013): 354.

70 Nathan Riley Carpenter and Benjamin N. Lawrance, eds., *Africans in Exile: Mobility, Law, and Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

71 An interesting counterexample to Alemayehu was another child who was displaced in the wake of the Battle of Maqdala, the son of a *negadras* who joined Emperor Tewodros in resisting the British: Hakim Workneh Eshete. Presumed orphaned and taken to Aden, then India to be educated in mission schools, eventually becoming a medical doctor, Workneh attempted to return to Ethiopia to help in the 1896 Italian attempt at Adwa but was blocked by British officers. However, they eventually connected him with Emperor Menelik after Ethiopia’s victory, marking Workneh’s reunion with his birth family and the beginning of a career in government service and later international diplomacy. Later in life, Workneh adopted the name Charles Martin from two colonels who had shown care for him. Few narratives make the comparison between Workneh and Alemayehu, even though they share origin stories. Importantly, unlike Alemayehu, Workneh was never brought into the same experiment of civilizational grafting to which the prince was subject. Indeed, unlike Workneh, Alemayehu brought with him the stigmas of his father’s forceful resistance and the added curiosity of his royal lineage. For more on Hakim Workneh Eshete, see Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002); Peter P. Garretson, *A Victorian Gentleman & Ethiopian Nationalist: The life & times of Hakim Wärgenäh, Dr. Charles Martin* (Oxford: James Currey, 2012).

in a recent Brooklyn Museum exhibition debuting Yasiin Bey's 2019 album, *yasiin bey: Negus*, uses images of the prince to signal a long tradition of Black American claims to diasporic lineage symbolized in Black African royalty, using a Ge'ez appellation for king to tie Alemayehu to "others who have led noble lives, including Henrietta Lacks and Nipsey Hussle."⁷² Such a gesture, however, risks reifying history in order to extol imperial romantics, using royalty as aspirational, without wider critique or historical context.⁷³ Taken together, the possibilities and challenges of diasporic approaches to Alemayehu's life trouble the founding assumptions of diasporic solidarity, disturbing easy bonds of collective identity on the basis of relatability. Instead, it is Alemayehu's inability to be understood that creates the basis of imaginative coming-together, an ambivalence born of the slippages of archive and memory, an ever-receding point of (no) return recognizable in some experiences of diasporic translocation.

Perhaps, then, it is precisely these difficulties in defining Alemayehu's condition that make him a *Black diasporic* figure. From this space, the space of speculation, Ethiopians can redeem the absences, the counterfactuals, and the truncated possibilities of a life cut short. In this sense, it does not do so from a place of authority-making, but from a position of thriving in the speculative and subjective space of its authors. It is related to a literary phenomenon Michelle Commander discusses in the context of Black American literary speculation. Talking about Black Americans writing alternative narratives that highlight the power and politics of the US space program, Commander demonstrates how "Afro-speculation attempts to rescue black humanity from oppressive structural systems by defying this very astigmatism; it invents cultural forms and apparatuses that seek not to correct America's political vision but to formalize black defiance."⁷⁴ Diasporic speculation about Alemayehu, then, inscribes the tellers into the ledger of protest and defiance against the British state. Envisioning both themselves *and* Alemayehu beyond the narrative structures that physically and literally tie him to his gravesite in London, these artists mobilize terms to shift the debate around the nature of British possession and Ethiopian dispossession, even as they remain ambivalent about singular or defining terms that scaffold

72 *yasiin bey: Negus*, exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, November 15, 2019–January 26, 2020, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/yasiin_bey_negus.

73 Nadia Nurhussein, *Black Land: Imperial Ethiopianism and African America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

74 Michelle Commander, "The Space for Race: Black American Exile and the Rise of Afro-Speculation," *ASAP/Journal* 1, no. 3 (2016): 432; See also Michelle Commander, *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

the logics of power that have enabled the record to cast Alemayehu into greater British imperial visions.

As of the writing of this essay, September 2023, a descendant of Captain Tristram Speedy returned a lock of Alemayehu's hair, taken when he was nine years old. Member of Ethiopia's National Heritage Restitution Committee Alula Pankhurst and art historian Jacopo Gnisci prevented a tabot taken at Maqdala from going to market with the aid of the Scheherazade Foundation, named after the storytelling heroine of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. In 2021, thirteen stolen artifacts, including illuminated manuscripts, an imperial shield, and a ceremonial cross, were also returned at an event in the Atheneum Club in London, days before the Ethiopian New Year. Lemn Sissay attended the ceremony, posed in a photograph holding a brass shield.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, as recently as May 2023, a spokesperson from Buckingham Palace has insisted that Prince Alemayehu's remains cannot be exhumed from St. George's Chapel, for fear of "disturbing the resting place of a substantial number of others in the vicinity."⁷⁶ Herein lie the ambivalences, the disturbing contours of that which can never be fully known, but nonetheless generate our reality.

Even as Alemayehu's physical remains stay entombed in England, it matters that diasporic Ethiopians have taken up their own approaches to re-telling Alemayehu's story; these acts wage critique of diasporic translocation even as they are attuned to the resonances of archives to life. In the words of Nkiru Nzegwu, artists who have undergone translocation exist in a life-space that "activates psychic vortices."⁷⁷ The telling of a story of a life is a conjuring, and for those who embody the same movements, and make claim to an affinity of identity with the ghosts of the past, these re-tellings carry special potency, bearing witness to a simultaneity of past, present, and future. Alongside the continued advocacy for the return of Alemayehu's physical remains, this speculative work provides an alternative testimony, making its own case to the continued life-force that Alemayehu occupies among Ethiopians, invigorating the fight for material reparations.

75 See coverage on BBC News, Al Jazeera, and London Evening Standard; Lemn Sissay, "The Looted." October 10, 2021, [https:// www.lemnissay.com/entoto/alemayhulock](https://www.lemnissay.com/entoto/alemayhulock).

76 Jibat Tamirat and Cecilia Macaulay, "Ethiopia's Prince Alemayehu: Buckingham Palace rejects calls to return royal's body," BBC News, May 22, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-65588663>.

77 Quoted in Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Challenges of Studying the African Diasporas," *African Sociological Review* 12, no. 2 (2008): 17.

Chapter 2

From “Lega Harar” to Adowa to Haile Selassie

The Evocation of Popular and Contested Symbols of Ethiopian Topography, Culture, and History in Self-Representations of Ethiopia and Ethiopians in Canada

Nassisse Solomon

The history, the land: all this can be interpreted as, what did history do
to us?

Ato Mengesha Beyene¹

In his exploration of overlapping territories and intertwined histories, Edward Said declares that “appeals to the past” are “among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present.”² Ethiopians and members of other interrelated Horn of African groups living within a contemporary global

1 Oral History Interview 1 with Ato Mengesha Beyene, March 27, 2014. The prefixes *Ato* and *Etye* are, respectively, the Amharic equivalents to Mr. and Mrs. Where appropriate, these titles are utilized throughout this research to signify customary respect for my elders who participated in this study.

2 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 3.

Diaspora embody the tenets of Said’s argument.³ Histories of migrants and migrations do not begin *in medias res*. Ethiopian history, topography, and culture are prominently referenced in both public and private articulations of Ethiopian identities within the Diaspora. Ethiopians living within the context of a Canadian Diaspora perpetually reference, invoke, revere, contest, and engage with representative elements of their cultural, political, and historical identity, fashioning unique forms of self-representation.

This Canadian case study is illustrative of the ways in which prominent signifiers of Ethiopian history throughout the twentieth century are integrated into self-representations by members of the Diaspora. With the exception of Mary Goitom’s body of work, Canadian scholarship on the Horn of Africa Diaspora has largely focused on ethnic disparities as principal points for identity formation upon migration. This work instead examines the ways in which members of the Diaspora perpetuate and maintain preceding historical signifiers, as means of asserting both their heterogeneity and historicity.

As defined by Stuart Hall, the cultural identity of the Horn of Africa Diaspora is, by and large, comprised of elements “which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.”⁴ Based on an analysis of self-representations in contemporary Canada (whether they be textual, physical, and/or in narrative form), it is evident that Ethiopians take great pride in their long and rich cultural history, which precedes their dispersal into a global Diaspora.

Through the use of oral histories as illustrative case studies, this chapter underscores the ways in which the interplay of history, politics, and culture continues to shape representations and perceptions of Ethiopian and other interrelated Horn of Africa identities in Canada. To a generation of Ethiopians living in the Diaspora, being Ethiopian and narrating Ethiopian

3 The term Horn of Africa Diaspora refers specifically to ethnic groups from the region which were either once considered to be a part of the Ethiopian nation-state (including Eritrea in 1952–91); or groups which have engaged in well-documented protracted struggles for independence, such as the Oromo and Tigray peoples. However, within a Canadian Diaspora context, this term also refers to the numerous other members of Ethnic groups who are in the present still considered to be a part of the Ethiopian nation-state (legally) but wish to identify otherwise. This includes the term Harari (listed as a category in the National Household Survey of 2016 (www.statcan.ca) and the term Gurage, a fact ascertained through the process of oral history interviews with members of the Diaspora.

4 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 223.

history are symbiotically connected with events that have transpired in that nation, as much as they are connected to perceptions of this history by the outside world, reinforcing the proclamation by interviewee Elias Omer that: “Ethiopia is significant, not only to who we are, but who we are not.”⁵

Collectively, the narratives and reflections of Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi, Ato Osman Omer, Etye Esther Tsegaye, Ato Mengesha Beyene, and Elias Omer all exemplify the extent to which their individual life trajectories and stories can be situated within larger frameworks of historicizing, contextualizing and interpreting Ethiopian migration to and settlement in Canada.⁶ Within the context of a broader contemporary global Diaspora, self-representations by Ethiopians are often framed in deliberate apposition to the pervasive lack of awareness of their cultural, and historical heritage. In contrast to their inconspicuous but politically charged existence within a vast multicultural milieu, most contemporary Ethiopian self-representations are deeply rooted in the culture, history, and topography of Ethiopia.

While deliberating his path to Canada, Ato Osman Omer broke off in mid-sentence to lament: “walking in the snow, I ask myself: how did you get here? My fingers are cracked, and I am standing there dreaming like a crazy person . . . growing up, I never wore a jacket.”⁷ Natalie Losi describes the state of the immigrant in the position of “either/or.”⁸ She asserts that immigrants often stand between at least two shores, two cultures, two ways of thinking, and that they live this transition as a schism or dichotomy.⁹ In juxtaposition to his present reality as a Black émigré postman in Southwestern Ontario, forcibly acclimated to the cold, unforgiving Canadian winter of Western Ontario, Ato Osman—the son of an Ethiopian farmer—fondly integrated memories of the fruit orchards, villas, and lush landscapes that prevailed in the Dire Dawa region throughout his childhood.¹⁰ He continued:

5 Author interview with Elias Omer, August 22, 2014.

6 The methodology applied is premised on the assertion that: “even though an individual can only directly experience the events of his or her own lifetime, when closely examining the life stories that individuals choose to tell, it is often clear that people will intentionally or unintentionally refer to historical frames whether familial, institutional, and national,” thus revealing something about the broader socio-historical context of their life stories. Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in Oral History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 43.

7 Author interview with Ato Osman Omer, March 7, 2014.

8 Natalie Losi, *Lives Elsewhere: Migration and Psychic Malaise*, trans. by Brett Shapiro (London: Karnac, 2006), 3.

9 Ibid.

10 The narratives of Ethiopian immigrants living within a context of a global Diaspora are truly reflective of the tenet held by oral historians, that “lives are

“I love my country very much”, expressing an attachment to a homeland, topography, and a world purview instilled in him by a mother who passed before he left his country in 1977.

A common thread for all of the interviews conducted with first generation immigrants was the centrality of Ethiopia, and by extension Ethiopian culture (*behal* and *amel*), to who they are as individuals.¹¹ Their roots strongly influence how they elect to conduct themselves in the world—whether it be here in Canada, back in Ethiopia, or in any of the other nation states in which they resided temporarily over the course of their journeys of migration and settlement. Etye Esther reinforced this perspective in her staunch declaration that she does not “believe that who you are changes with where you are,” because to her and the others interviewed in this chapter, being an “Ethiopian” is a primary identifier for life.¹² Consequently, their affinity for the history, culture, and topography of their “homeland” in coalescence with their memories of their “hometown” informed the participants’ expressions of identity.

Self-representations manifested through oral history are illustrative of the ways in which Ethiopians perpetually engage with representative elements of their cultural, political, and historical identity. Ethiopians who were born and raised during the reign of the Emperor Haile Selassie (1932–74), and then fled the nation during the rule of the Derg, tell embodied histories of their nation of origin. Members of this particular generation reframe common reductions of their life experiences as “displaced persons” and reclaim their identities through reliving their memories of home, and evocations of the historical symbolism and topography of their nation of origin. In keeping with Mary Goitom’s findings, Ethiopians interviewed for this study spoke to the fact that their homeland was the primary habitus in which their present self was developed, and where their history is embodied.¹³ In the poignant words of Ato Mengesha, “as an Ethiopian, you praise yourself, or life as a country.” He implies that, as an Ethiopian migrant, one can only

lived at the intersection of individual and social dynamics” (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, *Telling Stories*, 43). Each story, example, and life experience shared by the participants illustrated the ways in which social dynamics influenced the life trajectory of each and every participant.

- 11 An integral concept to conceptualizations of an Ethiopian identity, *behal* is the Amharic equivalent term for culture/custom and tradition combined. *Amel* refers to the way in which individuals conduct themselves in the world/acts.
- 12 Author interview II with Etye Esther Tsegaye, July 1, 2013.
- 13 Mary Goitom, “Discourses of Migration and Belonging: How Language Shapes the Return-Thinking Processes of Ethiopians in Canada,” *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47, no. 4 (2019): 396.

ever make sense of their identity within the present, through some knowledge of his/her collective past.¹⁴

Contextualizing Migration and Self-Representation

Contemporary representations of Ethiopian identity in Canada are best understood through the prism of individual narratives, in so much as they are through some knowledge of the political and social histories of both Ethiopia and Canada. From 1984 onwards, Ethiopian migration and settlement in Canada has been the major catalyst for the inconspicuous but politically charged and symbolic existence of Ethiopian identities within a vast multicultural milieu. In spite of references to Ethiopians in Canada prior to the 1960s, Ethiopians officially started appearing in Canadian immigration statistics for the first time in 1966, with twenty-seven people recorded as having Ethiopia as their “country of last residence.”¹⁵ The sole mandate of many of the early migrants was to study abroad and return to their nation of origin to implement their learnings towards modernizing their native homeland.¹⁶ As such, the number of Ethiopians recorded in Canada prior to the 1980s was negligible with less than a hundred people recorded in the census data per annum between 1966 and 1979.¹⁷ By 1983, there were 571

14 Author interview I with Ato Mengesha, March 27, 2014.

15 Statistical Data Source: Department of Manpower and Immigration, Immigration Statistics 1966, 20, table 10. It is hard to discern whether there were any Ethiopian immigrants to Canada prior to 1966. The data available prior to 1966 do not distinguish between different African source countries. Only immigrant numbers from “British African Countries,” such as Egypt, were distinguished.

16 For more detailed discussions with regards to temporary Ethiopian migration see the following works: Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002); Solomon Addis Getahun, *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900–2000: Patterns of Migration, Survival and Adjustment* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2007); Solomon Addis Getahun, “Brain Drain and Its Effect on Ethiopia’s Institutions of Higher Learning, 1970s–1990s,” *African Issues* 30, no. 1 (2002): 52–56; and Joseph W. Scott and Solomon A. Getahun, *Little Ethiopia of the Pacific Northwest* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013).

17 Canadian Immigration Statistics 1982, 12, table 10: “Country of Birth, Sex and Age Groups.”

Ethiopians listed as Landed Immigrants.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, there was an influx of immigrants to Canada from the war- and famine-riddled region. The prevalent factors for outmigration shaped both the public perceptions and self-representations of immigrants from the region for the coming decades.

Canadian awareness of the African nation was particularly heightened in the 1980s. Between 1984 and 1996, Ethiopia consistently ranked as one of the top ten source countries for “Convention Refugees and Members of Designated Classes” settling in Canada. During this same period of increased migration from the region, the Ethiopian famine (referred to as the African Famine) was the single biggest cause célèbre of the decade the world over from 1984 to 1988. Widespread engagement with famine relief efforts drew unprecedented attention to the plights of the continent and generated a steadfast narrative of the Ethiopian famine as a parable for African famine—and, subsequently, failed aid efforts.¹⁹ Ato Osman Omer explicitly addressed his experiences with public perceptions of Ethiopia and Ethiopians during the peak of the famine relief period. He recounted: “yes, being from Ethiopia and all those jokes about being hungry!” He spoke of a particularly memorable incident during a lunch hour one day at work. He told of how he visually scoured the lunchroom for friends, when a colleague beckoned him to sit over with a group. It was upon his arrival at the table that another member in the group made the odious joke “uh oh, watch out—he’s going to eat our leftovers!” Abject poverty, disease, civil conflict, and political corruption have been prevalent signifiers of “African” representations in Canada ever since.²⁰ Negative representations have in turn influenced the life experiences and perspectives of African immigrants.

Juxtaposed to the Canadian perceptions of his reality, Ato Osman described how his father was the proud owner of a fruit orchard which once yielded enough business to support a family comprised of twenty children.

18 Canadian Immigration Statistics 1983, 12, table 10: “Age Groups by Sex, by Country of Birth.”

19 Nassisse Solomon, “‘Tears are Not Enough’: Canadian Political and Social Mobilization for Famine Relief in Ethiopia, 1984–1988”, in *A Samaritan State Revisited: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Aid*, ed. Greg Donahy and David Webster (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2019), 245–68.

20 Wisdom J. Tetey and Korbla P. Puplampu, “Border Crossings & Home Diaspora Linkages Among African-Canadians: An Analysis of Translocational Positionality, Cultural Remittance, & Social Capital,” in *The African Diaspora in Canada: Negotiating Identity and Belonging*, ed. Wisdom J. Tetey and Korbla P. Puplampu (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 157.

Memories of the family orchard elicited colorful and vivid reminiscences of delectable “mangoes, tangerines, and dates.” With a middleman purchasing the fruits and other produce from his father to sell in the open market, Ato Osman proudly asserted that “this was how business was kept.”²¹ His memories were in clear apposition to prevalent representations and perceptions of Ethiopia as a drought stricken barren landscape.²²

Those former perceptions have held steadfast. The ideological parables of famine, perpetual poverty, and general “Third World” ineptitude inherent within the prevalent discourses on Ethiopia and Eritrea from a magnanimous period of famine and famine relief, continue to inform mainstream representations and perceptions of the region and its peoples well into the present.²³ Elias Omer proclaimed: “when they (outsiders) think of Ethiopia they think of that famine, the statistics of that famine are what they know.”²⁴ He asserted: “as a practitioner, a community development worker, it makes me sad; it makes me sad that all they see is Ethiopia as the most disadvantaged nation in the world—and only that.”²⁵ In contrast, he argued that: “Ethiopia has a History. Ethiopia has experienced changes, they are tangible.”²⁶

To date, the most comprehensive scholarship available on the nature of Ethiopian and other interrelated Horn of African identities in Canada has been by sociologist John Sorensen.²⁷ Sorensen’s individual and collaborative works on Ethiopia and other interrelated East Africans provide the necessary socio-historical and political context in which to interpret

21 Interview with Ato Osman Omer, March 9, 2014.

22 Ibid.

23 For more on this see: sociologist John Sorensen’s “Mass Media and Discourse on Famine in the Horn of Africa,” *Discourse and Society* 2, no. 2 (1991): 223–42; Susan Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999); and Nassisse Solomon, “1984: The Parable of Ethiopian Famine and Foreign Aid,” *Active History*, May 10, 2016, <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2016/05/10/1984-the-parable-of-ethiopian-famine-and-foreign-aid/>.

24 Author interview with Elias Omer, August 22, 2014.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Sorensen’s most germane works on the subject matter are: “Politics of Social Identity: ‘Ethiopians’ in Canada,” *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 19, no. 1 (1991): 67–86; “History and Identity in the Horn of Africa,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (1992): 227–52; “Essence and Contingency in the Construction of Nationhood: Transformations of Identity in Ethiopian Diasporas,” *Diaspora* 2, no.2 (1993): 201–28; and Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorensen, *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in the African Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

contemporary iterations and contestations of Ethiopian history. Sorensen’s monograph *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (1993) addresses the prevalence of history in the articulation of Ethiopian identities.²⁸ Of particular relevance is Sorensen’s seminal article “The Politics of Social Identity,” which effectively deconstructs the different terms of ethnic reference (both historical and contemporary) used to identify the heterogeneous group of people collectively recognized by the Canadian government as Ethiopians until 1991.²⁹ Grasping the processes of identity formation amidst various “Ethiopian” ethnic groups underscored by Sorensen in a Canadian context is imperative if we want to underst the underlying tensions alluded to and addressed outright throughout this chapter.³⁰

Over two decades after the establishment of a sizeable Horn of Africa Diaspora in Canada, political fragmentation within the Diasporic group has only heightened over time—often in nebulous and complicated ways. This is evidenced in scholarship by Sorensen and other emerging researchers on Oromos, Hararis, and Tigrays in Canada.³¹ Increased identity fragmentation is also evidenced in Canadian census data from both 2011 and 2016.³² In contrast, for the members of the Diaspora interviewed for this project, their articulations of history and identity invariably embodied elements of shared national and transnational experiences. They each provided purviews from which the age-old adage that, as Ethiopians “there is more that unites us than there is to divide us,” can be better understood

28 John Sorensen, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

29 Sorensen, “Politics of Social Identity,” 74.

30 Sorensen poignantly addresses the implications of the discordant roots of the Diaspora in “Essence and Contingency.”

31 See Martha K. Kumsa, “Between Home & Exile: The Dynamics of Negotiating Be-Longing among Oromos Living in Toronto”, in Tetty and Puplampu, *The African Diaspora in Canada*, 175–203; Semhar Zerat, “Identity Retention and Sense of Belonging: An Examination of Second Generation Eritrean Youth in Toronto” (Masters diss., Ryerson University, 2006); and Asafa Jalata, “The Place of the Oromo Diaspora in the Oromo National Movement: Lessons from the Agency of the ‘Old’ African Diaspora in the United States,” *Northeast African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2002): 133–60.

32 “2011 National Household Survey: Data tables–Table Directory,” <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Dir-eng.cfm>; and “2016 Census of Population – Data products (statcan.gc.ca),” <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>.

Table 2.1. Number of Ethiopians and other interrelated identities from the Horn of Africa in Canada

Provinces	Number of respondents identifying as being of “Ethiopian” ethno-cultural heritage	Number of respondents who described themselves as belonging to an ethno-cultural identity still counted as being within the current Ethiopian nation-state	Total number of respondents
Ontario	22,560	3,260	25,820
Alberta	13,225	2,680	15,905
Manitoba	2,900	795	3,695
British Columbia	2,545	455	3,000
Quebec	1,570	120	1,690
Saskatchewan	675	205	880
Nova Scotia	280	55	335
New Brunswick	175	30	205
Nunavut	25	0	25
Northwest Territories	20	0	20
Prince Edward Island	10	0	10
Yukon	0	0	0

**Information sourced and compiled from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census. Census Profile, 2016 Census (statcan.gc.ca)*

Underlying inter-community tensions studied by Sorensen are still existent, and overtly referenced by participants like Elias Omer, who described the disdain that he feels when asked “are you *Habesha*? or *Ambara*?” by others from his region of origin. He made a point of declaring that he typically does not “find it important to answer,” as these types of questions are “habitually designed to divide you and I.”³³ Addressing the political undercurrent of ethnic identifications within the context of a Global Diaspora, Elias boldly proclaimed that “Ethiopia is the unifying answer.”³⁴ His assertion was premised on conceptualizations of shared history/histories, identity (in spite of pluralism), culture, and geography. Ethiopian identities

33 Author interview with Elias Omer, August 22, 2014.

34 Ibid.

have always been multifaceted and complicated. Many Ethiopians can claim ancestry to more than one single ethnic group, and Elias is no exception. He freely cited that his mother is of Tigrayana and Amhara descent, whereas his father was a blend of Eritrean, Oromo, Amhara, and Yemeni descent.³⁵ Contrary to conventional wisdom, Elias’s mixed ethnic heritage is reflective of the norm in Ethiopian society and not the exception. Elias’s response to the identity question and his multiethnic composition is typical of many Ethiopians in the Diaspora.³⁶

An embrace of heterogeneity is integral to understanding and interpreting public and private representations of Ethiopian identities articulated throughout this chapter. The politics of identity manifested in similar fashion for Ato Osman Omer. When asked how he identified, Ato Osman proclaimed: “I am an Ethiopian, an immigrant from Ethiopia who is also of Oromo Ethnicity.”³⁷ Cognizant of the politics of ethnicity, when asked if a separate Oromo identity was something that he related to, he firmly responded with: “not really. I identify with being an Ethiopian; as an Ethiopian, I have a right to agree or disagree with the politics.”³⁸ Ethiopian identities have always been multifaceted and complicated. In the present, self-representations are often subject to contestation, engagement, and debate from within the diverse array of interrelated Horn of African ethnic identities living in Canadian socioscapes, versus from the general Canadian populace. Reclaiming historical relevancy is fraught with politics of identity construction, both from within and outside of the expansive Ethiopian or Horn of Africa Diaspora.

Simultaneously, for many Ethiopians, navigating their daily lives and negotiating their identities as Black bodies in a Canadian context is nothing short of a complex and multifaceted political act. Elias Omer lamented his encounters with questions regarding his identity when he surmised: “most people see me, and they see just a Black Man, sometimes they confuse me for a Rasta/Jamaican because I wear my hair in braids or dreads.”³⁹ Based on his experiences working with members of the general public, “most Canadians,” Elias argued, are painfully unaware of the integral differences

35 Ibid.

36 See the National Household surveys from 2006 onwards where many respondents from the Horn of Africa Region, or the present-day Ethiopian state, claim membership to more than a single Ethnic group. Visit: www.statcan.gc.ca.

37 Author interview with Ato Osman Omer, March 9, 2014.

38 Ibid.

39 Author interview with Elias Omer, August 22, 2014.

between the Black bodies and identities that navigate their socioscapescapes.⁴⁰ Wisdom J. Tettey and Korbla P. Pupilampu address the complexities and the distinctions between the myriad of African/Black identities that exist within Canada.⁴¹ In spite of the distinctions, in the present, an Ethiopian or an East African in Canada is simply perceived as “Black” or an émigré by the Canadian populace at large—often devoid of any social and historical contextualization of the individual’s country of heritage. In this same vein, Elias asserted: “I hate when people ask me if I am, or introduce me to others as an African, even more than when people ask me if I am an Eritrean or Ethiopian.”⁴² The act of being called an African is not what is offensive to Elias, rather the reductive and dismissive manner in which it is appropriated. Often, labelling someone as an African is not done with respect for the individual’s cultural heritage, migration trajectory, political agency, or national history. To Elias, and many others, the ignorance demonstrated by those unable to recognize the fact that there are cultural, historical, political, and linguistic differences between the fifty-four fully recognized states within the perimeters of the African continent is simply inexcusable, and it creates a dialectical tension from which certain responses arise.⁴³ The dialectical tension generated by the uninformed and reductive presumptions of the mass populace plays a role in self-representations articulated by Ethiopians.

It is in direct opposition to the pervasive synthesizing of Black identities that historically rooted and politically and culturally charged conceptualizations of *Blackness* and *Africaness* inherently permeate the construction self-representations of Ethiopian and interrelated identities in a contemporary Canadian context. Mary Goitom reinforces in her study that for Ethiopians,

40 By contrast, Elias asserts that regardless of their educational background and/or occupation, “people that are travelled have a different, deeper understanding of what Ethiopia is,” because “people who have travelled to South America, Europe, Asia, or Africa have different perspectives.” North Americans are typically immersed in their insular cultures and world purviews; thus, worldliness and intercultural competency are valued tenets to Elias (and many of the others interviewed for the larger study from which this chapter is sourced). Author interview with Elias Omer, August 22, 2014.

41 Wisdom J. Tettey and Korbla P. Pupilampu, “Ethnicity & the Identity of African-Canadians: A Theoretical and Political Analysis,” in Tetty and Pupilampu, *The African Diaspora in Canada*, 25–48.

42 Author interview with Elias Omer, August 22, 2014.

43 An assertion supported by Tettey and Pupilampu in their argument that homologous definitions of blackness in Canada are flawed representations which “lose sight of the dialectics of identity construction”, in “Continental Africans in Canada: Exploring a Neglected Dimension of the African-Canadian Experience,” in Tetty and Pupilampu, *The African Diaspora in Canada*, 11.

their secondary habitus is forged as a culmination of experiences in their primary habitus (their homeland), and further defined by other life experiences in their new milieu. She argues that Ethiopians in the Diaspora are forced to reckon with some level of internal restructuring which has occurred throughout their years spent away from "home."⁴⁴ The oral histories featured in this chapter underscore Goitom's arguments. It is evident that in addition to retelling a past, narratives and self-representations were positioned to reclaim the identities of those interviewed and counteract any willful minimization or reduction of their cultural and historical relevance.

Historicizing Self-Representation and Visual Signifiers

Immigrants, geographer Elizabeth Chacko argues, "bring with them understandings of places from which they hail, identifying themselves by a plethora of place-based labels."⁴⁵ As demonstrated by Chacko's research on Ethiopians in both Washington and Los Angeles, Ethiopians in the global Diaspora do this particularly well. Through her examination of ethnic sociocommescapes, Chacko argues that "the names of many of the establishments such as Addis Ababa, Merkato, Lalibela, Axum and Awash and Blue Nile harken back to toponyms of places and geographical features in Ethiopia."⁴⁶ Chacko's scholarship on the Ethiopian Diaspora in America has integrated spatial analysis to demonstrate the ways in which Ethiopian identities are expressed publicly. In particular, Chacko's 2003 article "Ethiopian Ethos and the Making of Ethnic Places in the Washington Metropolitan Area" merits a Canadian equivalent.⁴⁷ The city of Toronto in Canada serves

44 Goitom, "Discourses of Migration and Belonging," 396.

45 Elizabeth Chacko, "Translocality in Washington, D.C. and Addis Ababa: Spaces and Linkages of the Ethiopian Diaspora in Two Capitol Cities," in *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, edited by Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 176.

46 Elizabeth Chacko, "Ethiopian Ethos and the Making of Ethnic Places in the Washington Metropolitan area," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 20, no. 2 (2003): 33.

47 Other individual and collaborative works by Chacko of relevance are: "Identity and assimilation among young immigrant Ethiopians in Metropolitan Washington," *Geographical Review* 93, no. 4 (2003): 491–506; and Elizabeth Chacko and Ivan Cheung, "The Formation of Contemporary Ethnic Enclaves: Little Ethiopia in Los Angeles and Washington D.C.," in *Race, Ethnicity, and Place in a Changing America*, 2nd ed., ed. John W. Frazier, Eugene L. Tettey-Fio, and Norah F. Henry (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011), 129–41.

as a good exemplar for such a study. On a stretch of a mere four hundred meters on Danforth Street, between Greenwood Ave and Coxwell Avenue alone, there are eleven different Ethiopian dining establishments listed.⁴⁸

Outside of the oral histories featured in this chapter, historical signifiers of Ethiopian identity currently visible throughout the Canadian milieu range from restaurants and businesses to places of worship and community associations. Heralding the legacy of the Abyssinian empire and invoking Biblical connections to the Queen of Sheba (and King Solomon), Ethnic businesses in the Diaspora showcase replicas of cultural artefacts that attest to the prominence of their history. Images of the classic kingdom of Aksum/Axum (AD 100–700) and the holy city of Lalibela are ubiquitous. The political statements made by the hanging of portraits of the renowned Emperor Haile Selassie reinforce just how recent this past is.⁴⁹ The evocation of the Queen of Sheba, the Abyssinian empire, the civilization of Aksum, the Battle of Adowa, and Emperor Haile Selassie all reinforce the existence of a once steadfast and prolific narrative surrounding the “golden age” of Ethiopian cultural and historical prominence.⁵⁰ Select members of the Diaspora would like to keep these memories alive through recollection, representation, and commemoration.

Across the Canadian socioscape and the broader Ethiopian Diaspora around the globe, Axum (Aksum) is one of the most commonly utilized visual signifiers for Ethiopian establishments.⁵¹ Dagmawi Woubeshet,

48 A Google Maps search for “Ethiopian Restaurants in Toronto” on January 4, 2021, listed the following: Hirut Café Restaurant, Lucy Ethiopian Restaurant, Merhaba Bar & Café, Meda Lounge and Restaurant, Sora Restaurant, Mocha Café and Pastry, Wazema Ethiopian Restaurant, Rendez-Vous Eritrean Ethiopian and Eritrean Restaurant, Blue Nile Restaurant, Abugida Ethiopian/Eritrean Restaurant and Lounge.

49 Poignant examples across the country include: in Calgary, Abyssinia Restaurant (<http://www.abysiniarestaurant.ca/site/>); in Toronto, Lalibala, Sheba, Abyssinia, King Solomon and Queen of Sheba restaurant (<https://king-solomon-and-queen-of-sheba-ethiopian-restaurant.business.site/>, <http://lalibelacuisine.com/>, <https://abysiniarestauranttoronto.com/>, <https://flavoursfshesha.com/>); Vancouver, Abyssinia (<https://www.abysiniaburnaby.com/>); Edmonton, Abyssinia Ethiopian Restaurant & Bar.

50 Fikru Negash Gebrekidan also argues that in Black studies, “the Ethiopian past epitomized a golden age in which Africans enjoyed relative prominence in world history,” one that has since diminished considerably. Fikru Negash Gebrekidan “Ethiopia in Black Studies from W. E Du Bois to Henry Gates, Jr,” *Northeast African Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015): 3.

51 There is an Axum restaurant in Vancouver, <http://www.axumrestaurant.ca/>, as well as one in Toronto: Axum Restaurant on the Danforth in Toronto (<https://opengovca.com/toronto-business/B71-0229330>).

Salamishah Tillet, and Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis argue that the classical civilization of Aksum was the early beginning of what is modern-day Ethiopia.⁵² The iconic obelisks of Aksum often hung in prominence are testament to the existence of a powerful and expansive indigenous African civilization (5000–2000 BCE) and the resilience and triumph of an African people in the face of colonization (the Battle of Adowa in 1896 and the Italo-Ethiopian War and Occupation 1934–1941). The obelisks of Aksum were prolific signifiers that influenced the perceptions and representations surrounding the Horn of Africa nation and its peoples for much of the twentieth century, when knowledge of classical history mattered and had a broad-based cultural cachet.⁵³

To a generation of Ethiopians, the evocation of Aksum is integral to understanding Ethiopian history from both within and outside of the Horn of Africa. In addition to being a visible historical signifier across the diversity of the Diaspora, Aksum was also referenced explicitly or implicitly by each and every one of the interviewees featured in this study. Concurrent with its

52 Dagmawi Woubshet, Salamishah Tillet, and Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, “The Romance of Ethiopia: A Critical Introduction”, *Callaloo* 33, no. 1 (2010): 8.

53 Within an exclusively Canadian context Aksum figured prominently in the discourses on Ethiopia and Ethiopians during the Abyssinian crisis and the subsequent Italo-Ethiopian War (1934–36), and once more during Ethiopian participation at Expo 67 in Montreal. Primary evidence of the prevalence of Aksum as a signifier in the 1930s includes: “Italy Prepares Coast Defence: France Applying Brakes in Move For Penalties; African holy City Captured,” *London Evening Advertiser*, October 8, 1935: front page; and “Tribal Troops Circled: Holy War Looms With Fall of Aksum; Financial Isolation is Near,” *The Halifax Herald*, October 15, 1935: front page. Evidence of the prominence of Aksum as a signifier in the mid-twentieth century includes “Pearson Lights Flame to Open Expo 67 and Calls it Monument to Man,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1967: 18. This latter article includes a photo of the Ethiopian Pavilion featuring two obelisks (replicas of the monument of Aksum), speaking to the ubiquity of the towers. Aksum was the inspiration for the Ethiopian Pavilion at Expo 67. The Ethiopian Pavilion at Expo 67 was cone-shaped “and colorful—purple and red with golden decorations”—reminiscent of the ceremonial umbrellas of the priests of the ancient Ethiopian city of Aksum. The doorway to the pavilion was at the top of a flight of stairs “flanked by lions representing the 13 provinces of the empire—visitors look down on a replica of the Church of St. George at Lalibela, its interior containing the Crowns of Axum, 1,000 silver crosses and other objects d’art.” (Source: “Ethiopia,” Expo 67 Official Guide (1967), 139. Library and Archives Canada, Expo Collection). A full page advertisement, “Ethiopia His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I First Head of State to Visit Expo 67,” was printed in *The Montreal Gazette*, May 1, 1967: 21.

use as a prominent signifier, awareness of the expansive nature of the classical empire is also fundamental to understanding the long-rooted socio-historical connections of Ethiopians with places such as modern-day Djibouti, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, and their peoples. At its peak in the third century CE, Aksum covered a vast region including parts of southern Egypt, northern Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen, and southern Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴ By virtue of his illustrative life experiences, Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi asserted that “you have to read the history of Arabia and Ethiopia, you have to read both, to understand how the influence has affected both sides.”⁵⁵

Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi’s family narrative exemplifies the long-rooted and complex historical, economic, cultural, and political connections between Ethiopia and Yemen. Through the prism of the life trajectory of his paternal grandfather and grandmother, and their role and influence in the city of Dire Dawa, one gleans insight into the cosmopolitan fabric of Ethiopian society influenced by historic relations with neighboring countries, kingdoms, and empires.⁵⁶ Renowned for their engineering and construction expertise, Yemenis like his grandfather Alwan Ali Al-Adeimi travelled to and settled in the city of Dire Dawa in search of engineering projects. Economic prospects in engineering were available to outside consultants during the early 1920s, preceding the period of Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941. Alwan Al-Ademi eventually married a lady of *Adere* descent from Harar and put down roots in Ethiopia.⁵⁷

Harar, being a city of historical significance as it was once a thriving epicenter of Islamic studies in Ethiopia, led Ato Mohamed Al Adeimi into a discussion of the significance of the historical relationship of Islam to Ethiopia. “Islam,” he asserted, was saved by an Ethiopian, “Bilal l’Habesha,” and this fact he argued “is not given enough attention by Historians of Ethiopia.”⁵⁸ To Ato Mohamed Al-Ademi, the coexistence of Muslims and Christians for centuries is critical to understanding the integrative fabric of Ethiopian society. And it is through Aksum and the relationship between Arabia and

54 Woubeshet, Tillet, and Giorgis, “The Romance of Ethiopia,” 8.

55 Author interview I with Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi, December 11, 2013.

56 Recent scholarship on the Muwalladin supports the arguments outlined by Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi throughout both of his interview sessions. In particular, see: Sophia Pandya, “Yemenis and Muwalladin in Addis Ababa: Blood Purity and the Opportunities of Hybridity,” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 96–114; and Samson A. Bezabeh, “Yemeni Families in the Early History of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia ca. 1900–1950: A Revisionist Approach in Diasporic Historiography,” *Cahiers d’Études africaines* 51, no. 4 (204) (2011): 893–919.

57 Author interview II with Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi, February 19, 2014.

58 Ibid.

Ethiopia that the long-rooted nature of "the Christian and Muslim bond" is evidenced.⁵⁹

Consequently, to some, knowledge of the civilization of Aksum both literally and figuratively explains the inherent cosmopolitanism of contemporary Ethiopian society; inasmuch as awareness of the civilization explains why Ethiopians in the Diaspora continue to evoke the ancient city as an integral component in their self-representations and articulations of Ethiopian history and identity. In the summative words of historian Harold Marcus, Aksum may have disintegrated and faded from prominence after the seventh century, however, "it never disappeared and always reappeared in fact."⁶⁰

Following convention, historian Bahru Zewde writes: "Ethiopian history began with the visit of the Queen of Sheba, allegedly from Ethiopia to Solomon, King of Israel in the tenth century B.C."⁶¹ Hence the subsequent pervasive reference to Ethiopia's "three thousand years of history" through popular discourses and mediums throughout most of the twentieth century.⁶² Aksum was a significant part of this legacy. The embodiment of the oft-referenced three-thousand-year legacy, Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia (1932–74) was the most recognizable symbol of Ethiopian identity and history throughout the world. The emperor was frequently referred to as "the 225th descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba."⁶³ When the emperor was invited to Canada to preside over events scheduled for Ethiopia's National Day at Expo 67 in Montreal, Governor Michener proclaimed: "Canada could rejoice, that an emperor whose country traces its history back 2000 years was helping a youthful Canada mark

59 Ibid.

60 Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xvii.

61 Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* (London: James Currey, 1991), 7.

62 The emperor was invited to Canada to preside over events scheduled for Ethiopia's National Day (May 2) at Expo 67 in Montreal. Both the emperor's state visit and Ethiopian participation in Expo 67 signify a crossroads in Canadian and Ethiopian history. Governor Michener encapsulated this crossroads through his pronouncement that "Canada could rejoice, that an emperor whose country traces its history back 2000 years was helping a youthful Canada mark the 100th anniversary of confederation" (Transcript of the Prime Minister's Remarks at the Official Welcome of his Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie to Ottawa Parliament Hill, Sunday, April 30, 1967. LB Pearson Papers: Speeches, Box No. MG 26 N, Vol.43. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa Canada).

63 John Gray, "Emperor En Route To City," *Montreal Daily Star*, May 1, 1967: 1.

the 100th anniversary of confederation.”⁶⁴ The narrative was steadfast and deeply entrenched into the vernacular of politicians and lay people alike. This phenomenon dissipated with the ousting of the emperor in 1974. In the present, Ethiopians are resurrecting this prominent legacy when they pay homage to him.

Adowa (also spelt Aduwa, Adua, or Adwa) is another prominent historic and contemporary signifier of Ethiopian history and identity often referred to by members of the Diaspora. In *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (2011), Historian Raymond Jonas characterizes the famous battle as a part of “our global heritage,” seeing it as a pivotal moment that paved the way for significant world events in the twentieth century.⁶⁵ On March 1, 1896, an Ethiopian army led by Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II and his wife Empress Taytu won what scholars have framed as “a spectacular victory over a European army,” effectively turning the “world upside down.”⁶⁶

A late nineteenth-century emblematic victory of a Black army against all odds, Adowa defined perceptions of Ethiopian political and cultural significance throughout the Western world. In the mid-1930s, headlines told of Italians seeking to “avenge the defeat of 40 years ago by taking Adowa.”⁶⁷ In the mid-twentieth century, Emperor Haile Selassie was widely introduced as the “235th ruler in an unbroken line of rulers.”⁶⁸ The legacy that Emperor

64 Transcript of the Prime Minister’s Remarks at the Official Welcome of his Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie to Ottawa Parliament Hill, Sunday, April 30, 1967. LB Pearson Papers: Speeches, Box No. MG 26 N, Vol.43. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa Canada.

65 Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011):1.

66 Ibid. Other influential historical monographs attesting to the symbolism of the Battle of Adowa include: Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855–1974* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); the collected edition of works *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections On Ethiopia’s Historic Victory Against European Colonialism*, ed. Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005); Chris Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menelik II: Ethiopia 1883–1910* (London: Ravens Educational and Developmental Services, 1986); Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); and Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie’s War* (Oxford: Signal Books, 1984), particularly the Prologue, also references the symbolism of the Battle of Adowa.

67 “Italians Avenge Defeat of 40 years Ago by Taking Adowa,” *The Evening Telegram* (St. John’s, Newfoundland), October 7, 1935: 4.

68 Alexander Farrell, “Leaders Value Selassie Role,” *The Leader Post* (Regina), April, 26, 1967: 12. To cite a few examples: “Emperor heads for Ottawa,” *The*

Haile Selassie embodied in 1967, had first penetrated Western mass consciousness at the close of the infamous battle of Adowa in 1896, and it was resurrected during the Italo-Abyssinian/Italo-Ethiopian conflicts of 1934–36. Canadians invoked the historical legacy of Adowa during the Emperor's statewide visit in 1967. In his welcome, Premier Bennett of Victoria, British Columbia, "reminded the guests that Ethiopia's fight against invading Italy in 1935 was a foretaste of the Second World War."⁶⁹ Bennett declared to the emperor: "when most of the world slept, you fought, just as your people had fought the same enemy 40 years before for the same cause: independence."⁷⁰ The battle of Adowa was a fixed historical moment that shaped the global narrative on Ethiopia and Ethiopians for more than half of the twentieth century.

Reverential references to the late-nineteenth-century battle were the basis for a collectivist and symbolic pan-African consciousness, hinged upon Ethiopian identity. Pan-Africanism centered on Ethiopia dissipated after 1974. However, the tenets of Ethiopian symbolism continue to inform the tenor of commemorative events and publications by Ethio-Canadian Associations in the present. In the absence of a general awareness of Black history within Canada, much less Ethiopian or African history; every March, various Ethio-Canadian cultural associations across Canada publish editorials in their newsletters and websites, and host commemorative Adowa Day Events.⁷¹ The obscurity and invisibility of “Black” or “African” History in Canada is addressed by various scholars. Henry M. Codjoe asserts that

Leader Post (Regina), April 20, 1967: 20; "Il y a 3,000 ans, naissait le royaume de Selsassie," *La Presse*, May 2, 1967; William S. Robinson, "Expo Welcomes Lion of Judah," *The London Free Press*, May 2, 1967: 3; John Gray, "Emperor En Route To City," *The Montreal Star*, May 1, 1967: front page; Montreal (CP), "To Preside at National Day," *The Chronicle-Herald* (Halifax), May 2, 1967: front page.

69 "City's Warmth Touches Visitor," *The Daily Colonist*, April 28, 1967: 21.

70 Ibid.

71 Some prime examples of Ethio-Canadian Association commemorations and/or publications include: “118 Adwa Victory Celebration in Toronto, Canada”, aired on Berhan TV, YouTube, published on March 23, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zNPth-JFMQ; the “Menelik II Mobilization Proclamation” published in the newsletter of the Ethiopian Association of Vancouver, September 2014, 14, www.vancouverethiopia.com/Resources/Documents/ጉረማይሌ%202.pdf. And last but not least, my personal participation as both an audience member and a guest lecturer in Adowa day commemorative events by the London Ethiopian Community Association held at the Cross-Cultural Learner Centre, March 2013 and in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in March 2015 and March 2018. For more information on the Association, visit: <https://eccalondonontario.com/about-us/welcome/>.

within Canadian society there is a mismatch between the African Canadian students' culture and that of Canadian schools and society as a whole; Blacks, including Ethiopians and other Africans, are essentially erased, marginalized, and/or homogenized.⁷² As a collective act, it is in the face of historical obscurity, that celebrating Adowa affords the opportunity to remember Ethiopian historical exceptionalism. Simultaneously, it is also in the spirit of pan-Africanism and African unity that most ethnic association publications, celebrations, and narratives on Adowa underscore the imperative of coming together and celebrating a legacy of resistance to foreign domination.

Above all, the act of public commemoration and reflection on Adowa is a political stance deeply rooted in a utopian and idealist perception of Ethiopian history. This interpretation continues to prevail within communities, and select historical scholarship, but awareness of Adowa has dissipated from mass social consciousness. With a focus on ethnic disparities, and the conflicts which have shaped the psyche of generations of Ethiopians, Adowa is a conspicuous reminder of the complicated nature of narrating and remembering Ethiopian history.

In his narrative, Ato Osman Omar asserted that the battle of Adowa is a demonstration of how the "bravery of our forefathers kept the Italians at bay."⁷³ He underscored the fact that whatever quarrels were existent within the framework of the Abyssinian empire, the leaders of the regions worked in unison in the late nineteenth century to defeat a common enemy. To Ato Osman, this was the most important part of the narrative. What comes after the victory is far more complicated and less celebratory. In the midst of his reflection, he concluded that it is inarguable that in that moment, "Menelik made Ethiopia one by force, whether we agree or disagree."⁷⁴ Speaking to a virulent contemporary debate on the outcomes of the Battle of Adowa, Ato Osman recapitulated that "the people of the South suffered a lot."⁷⁵ He acknowledged that "somehow, they got conquered and they became one," and that "if Menelik was smart, he would have put in a federal system."⁷⁶

72 Henry M. Codjoe, "Africa(ns) in the Canadian Educational System: An Analysis of Positionality & Knowledge Construction," in Tetty and Puplampu, *The African Diaspora in Canada*, 66, 79.

73 Interview with Osman Omer, March 9, 2014.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid. For more with regards to this argument, see critiques of "Ethiopian Hegemony" offered within the following works: Asafa, "The Place of the Oromo Diaspora in the Oromo National Movement"; Martha K. Kumsa, "Between Home & Exile: The Dynamics of Negotiating Be-Longing among Oromos Living in Toronto," in Tetty and Puplampu, *The African Diaspora in*

Yet, he concluded that “we are not going to rewrite history,” albeit “that was a mistake.”⁷⁷

The act of representing and remembering Adowa is inarguably fraught with politics of identity. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Adowa is the lynchpin to understanding the venerable past that a generation of Ethiopians allude to within the context of their individual life narratives. Awareness of Adowa shapes both constructions and contestations of representations of their identity. In light of the outcomes of the first Ethiopian victory over a white European power in 1896, many conflate this first victory with the outcomes of the second, more prolonged and protracted period of political dueling, outright war, and occupation by the Italians from 1934 to 1942. Many Ethiopians encountered over the course of this research emphasized the centrality of Ethiopian strength and unity in their proclamation that: “nowhere in the world can they classify us as colonized—it was an occupation!”⁷⁸

Conclusions

Concepts of history, memory, and identity buttress one another, and have fundamental relevance to the ways in which human beings conduct themselves. It has been well established within the available scholarship that the Ethiopian and interrelated Diaspora officially started to form in Canada, and the rest of the world, after the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974.⁷⁹ In histories of migration, there is always a nexus between personal, cultural, and national histories. When interpreting contemporary iterations of Ethiopian identities present within the broader Diaspora, some contextual knowledge of the political and cultural history of the Horn of Africa region and Canada’s

Canada, 175–203; and Zerat, “Identity Retention and Sense of Belonging.” For more context in this regard, see Sorensen, “Essence and Contingency”; Sorensen, “Politics of Social Identity; and Matsuko and Sorensen, *Ghosts and Shadows*.

77 Interview with Ato Osman Omer, March 9, 2014.

78 Author interview I with Ato Mengesha Beyene March 27, 2014.

79 For more information with regards to Ethiopian migration to Canada see: “Ethiopians,” as found on the Multicultural Canada website, <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/e6>; Helene Moussa, *Storm & Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Ontario: Artemis Enterprises, 1993); Matsuko and Sorensen, *Ghosts and Shadows*, 13; and Ransford Danso, “From ‘there’ to ‘here’: An investigation of the initial settlement experiences of Ethiopian and Somali refugees in Toronto,” *Geo Journal* 56, no. 1 (2002): 3–14.

relationship to it is integral to understanding both mainstream Canadian perceptions and self-representations by members of the Diaspora.

In their critical introduction to the “Romance of Ethiopia,” Woubshet, Tillet, and Giorgis attest to the fact that to the outside world, the revolution of 1974 would effectively render Ethiopia’s monarchs “relics” of a distant past; and by the late twentieth century, “images of famine and abject poverty—not obelisks, rock-hewn churches, and grand mosques” would become the most pervasive references for Ethiopia in the West.⁸⁰ This was no different in Canada. Yet, it is in opposition to the disappearance of knowledge about their historical and cultural heritage that Ethiopians in the Diaspora are engaged in various forms of self-representation that evoke a once deep-seated tradition.⁸¹

Notably, in *Imagining Ethiopia* Sorensen makes the poignant argument that for the heterogenous group of peoples from the Horn of Africa region, “conflicts over images, histories, and identities are struggles for power,” which have historically been “efforts to create and define reality.”⁸² Elements of Sorensen’s arguments still ring true, as members of a distinctive Diaspora continue to evoke archetypal symbols of a distant past, to represent themselves within the present. From commemorations of Adowa day (early March) held by Ethiopian Associations across Canada to the common evocations of the *Anbessa* (Lion of Judah), the prolific use of images of the ancient churches of Lalibela and the pillars of Aksum, to the public display of photographs of the Emperor Haile Selassie, Ethiopians deliberately select prolific signifiers of their national and cultural history to represent themselves within Canadian milieus. Yet, increasingly, it is in the absence of a general awareness of Ethiopian cultural and/or political history that multigenerational diasporic communities across Canada are engaged in impassioned displays of self-representation and memorialization. Indelibly influenced by their memories of Ethiopia under the reign of the Emperor Haile Selassie, and further impacted by the political and social transformation of Ethiopia under the Marxist-Leninist Derg Military regime (1974–91), the immigrants featured in this chapter lived in Ethiopia through parts of these historical periods and their life trajectories and narratives inherently embody and personify these markers of Ethiopian history and identity within a Canadian milieu.⁸³ Ethiopians in the Diaspora, Woubshet, Tillet, and Giorgis argue, often “look back to a time” when their history “was one of the richest and most powerful

80 Woubshet, Tillet, and Giorgis, “The Romance of Ethiopia,” 10.

81 Ibid.

82 Sorensen, *Imagining Ethiopia*, 3.

83 Woubshet, Tillet, and Giorgis, “The Romance of Ethiopia,” 14.

in the world,”⁸⁴ leading some members of the Diaspora like Ato Mengesha to reflect and proclaim that “the history, the land—all this can be interpreted as, what did history do to us.”⁸⁵

From a Canadian perspective, African identities are largely unknown, misunderstood, and/or *dehistoricized*—exemplars of the “unremembered colonial heritage” to which Kadiatu Kanneh refers in her works.⁸⁶ Most of the symbols of Ethiopian history evoked by members of the Diaspora in the present were once prevalent signifiers of Ethiopian history and identity visible within a mainstream Canadian consciousness. Many contemporary signifiers were evident in the prevalent discourses and representations of the Horn of Africa nation during the Abyssinian Crisis and Ethiopian participation in Expo 67.⁸⁷ Contemporary Ethiopians Diasporans hark back to these periods in the twentieth century to articulate the widespread cultural cachet of their history and the implications of its disappearance from mass consciousness. Ato Al Deimi’s testimony gives voice to this central tenet of this chapter when he asserts that knowledge of the distant past is imperative to understanding and asking: “what’s happened in the last 2000 years?”⁸⁸

Without a doubt, a cultural devaluation occurs through erasure in “history,” and a Horn of Africa Diaspora case study is demonstrative of the ways in which history, historical narratives, and social memory can both empower and dis-empower. Missing from much of the scholarship on the Ethiopian Diaspora in Canada to date, the handful of voices featured in this chapter are reflective of the complicated and “integrative fabric of the Ethiopian cultural mosaic,” both within and outside the perimeters of their original national boundaries.⁸⁹ The life stories and opinions expressed in them are inherently

84 Ibid., 10, 14.

85 Author Interview I with Ato Mengesha Beyene, March 27, 2014.

86 Kadiatu Kanneh, “History, ‘Africa’ and Modernity,” *Interventions* 1, no. 1 (1998): 31.

87 Some primary resources in support of this argument are: “Ethiopia and the West,” Restricted Department of External Affairs Report, File 1646–40, Library and Archives Canada, Box No. RG 25, Vol. 2857. LB Pearson Papers: Speeches, Library and Archives Canada, Box No. MG 26 N, Vol.25; “African Stabilizer: Haile Selassie,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 1967: 2. Don Shannon, “Haile Selassie Winning New Ethiopian Battles: Emperor Succeeds in Bold Move to Make Addis Ababa Capital of Pan-Africanism,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1965.

88 Author interview with Dr. Mohammed Al-Adeimi, December 11, 2013.

89 The term “Integrative Mosaic” was utilized by Ato Mohammed to describe his hometown of Dire Dawa, Ethiopia and his experiences growing up immersed in Ethiopian culture. A settlement worker within a Canadian Framework, Ato Mohammed used terms from his profession and review of the scholarly

political. However, each of these individuals is aware of their own subjectivity. As Ato Mengesha eloquently surmised: “how I envision Ethiopia in the 1960s is not true of the ways in which another perceives it in the 1970s.” He asserts: “what was his motto? his politics?”⁹⁰

Ultimately, self-representations by members of the Horn of Africa Diaspora are exemplars of Kanneh’s call for the need to read “African diasporic and Black identities as historically textured and politically determined constructs, constructs which rely on particular understandings of time, memory, and race.”⁹¹ Contemporary scholarly attention has moved away from examining more conventional and heralded “measures of Ethiopian greatness,” such as “war, wealth, conquest, and power,” moving instead “towards a more subtle and critical understanding of its literature, life, and culture.”⁹² Yet, it is interesting to see the ways in which this past that has a “chiaroscuro under which to sit” continues to manifest itself within Diasporic communities in Canada.⁹³

The life histories and experiences of five first-generation members of the Ethiopian Diaspora between the ages of thirty-five and sixty-five are exemplars of self-representations and embodiments of Ethiopian history existent within contemporary Canadian society.⁹⁴ Aside from being deeply personal, the micro-histories shared and the narratives collected during the course of this study are also illustrative of the *realpolitik* implications of historical discourses and representations.⁹⁵ “The memories that you have,” Ato Mohamed Al-Adeimi proclaimed, “mitigate for any feelings of displacement and experiences of discrimination that one might encounter in the Diaspora.”⁹⁶ He further elaborated that with a strong understanding of your

literature in assessment of both Ethiopian society and the Ethiopian Diaspora, throughout our interview sessions. Interview 2 with Ato Mohammed, from February 19, 2014.

90 Author interview I with Ato Mengesha, March 27, 2014.

91 Kadiatu Kanneh, *African Identities: Race, Nation and Culture in Ethnography, Pan Africanisms and Black Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1998), 48.

92 Woubshet, Tillet, and Giorgis, “The Romance of Ethiopia,” 9.

93 Ibid.

94 In line with the research data gleaned from Statistics Canada, the term “first-generation” utilized throughout this chapter refers to people who were born outside of Canada. Moreover, the first-generation participants in this study were all born in Ethiopia and had lived there for more than two decades. For the definition of first-generation as defined by Statistics Canada, visit https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011003_2-eng.cfm, accessed on March 30, 2012.

95 Kanneh, “History, ‘Africa’ and Modernity,” 30.

96 Author interview I with Mohammed Al-Adeimi, December 11, 2013.

past “you don’t get the feeling that somebody is saying you are like this or like that.” He argued that through an understanding of the past, as an immigrant: “you are more than just that one study that says that you belong in that one pigeonhole; you have a history, you have a story.”⁹⁷

Elements of the past and concepts of history continue to resonate within communities across the Diaspora. Youth inherit the gravitas of the narratives into which they are born. Those who identify as *Habesha* continue to carry the mantle of the past. As Tsegereda Yohannes proclaimed: “When navigating through cultures, history lets us have a definition. History legitimizes our Identity. It is History that makes us unique, that makes us who we are.”⁹⁸

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97 Ibid.

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Chapter 3

Young Diasporans of Ethiopian Origin

A Historically Grounded Generation

Alpha Abebe

Introduction

The Ethiopian diaspora in North America was largely constituted by people prompted to leave or flee Ethiopia following the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia, or those who were forced to overstay work or study visas to evade the violence or turmoil. Conflict-generated diaspora groups, like this particular wave of migrants, have an inherently complex social, political, and emotional relationship with their countries of origin. Much of this complexity is manifested in the diaspora-state relations of émigrés, but it also seeps into the personal and everyday discourses and practices that characterize diasporan lives. While there have been subsequent waves of forced and voluntary migrants from Ethiopia, each of these waves has a unique shared experience in terms of the conditions of their departure and the nature of their reception and settlement in the West.

Berg and Eckstein argue that pre- and post-emigration experiences may be more significant in defining generations of migrants and their children than birth and age cohort.¹ They developed a conceptual framework termed “historically grounded generations” and argue “if migrants from any one

1 Berg and Eckstein, “Introduction.”

country uproot at different times with different lived experiences, they would constitute different historically embedded generations.”² Using this framework as a starting point, I approach the large cohort of migrants who fled Ethiopia during the Derg regime in the 1970s and 1980s and settled in cities across North America as a particular historically grounded generation. This involves appreciating how the socio-political environment in Ethiopia before their migration and the nature of their departure from the country has profoundly shaped their post-migration lived experiences, including their settlement patterns, social relations, diasporic identities, and homeland engagement. As I discuss further below, this should not obfuscate the heterogeneity of experiences within this cohort of migrants, nor should it detract from the agency of these individuals in charting their own life courses. Instead, thinking through a specific “historically grounded generation” as an analytical lens is meant to alert us to some of the structural processes that connect the groups of people within this cohort, and the sociopolitical points of reference that these individuals often find themselves navigating as they govern their own lives.

The reach and influence of these structural processes does not begin and end with the emigrants themselves, but rather this story continues to unfold with their children born and/or raised in North America—a group I call young diasporans of Ethiopian origin (YDEOs) and focus on in this chapter. In the sections below, I describe a group of YDEOs and highlight some of the structural processes that have influenced the patterns I observed in their social and transnational lives. While the YDEO respondents in my research grew up in various cities across North America and had unique lived experiences and personality traits, there was a rhythm to their narratives as they described their upbringing, decision-making processes, and various social and transnational practices. Through an examination of these shared experiences, I argue that the population sampled in my research—that is, a segment of the first large cohort of people of Ethiopian descent born and/or raised in North America—has been shaped by a unique and powerful set of sociopolitical circumstances and cultural influences and are, in themselves, a “historically grounded generation.”

Methodology and Sampling

This chapter is informed by fifty-five in-depth interviews conducted between 2012 and 2014 with YDEOs across North America. Their narratives and life histories were collected as part of my doctoral research project, which

2 Ibid., 9.

explored how and why YDEOs in North America engage with Ethiopian development and charitable initiatives.³ Some of these initiatives included transnational political campaigns, establishing NGOs in Ethiopia, online fundraising efforts, and working within the Ethiopian development sector, among others. My research methods were qualitative and included multi-site fieldwork in Toronto, Washington, DC, New York, and Addis Ababa. In addition to in-depth interviews, I also attended eight relevant community events in the various cities, at which I played the role of a participant observer. Toronto and Washington, DC were selected as field sites because these cities are home to the largest and most established Ethiopian diaspora communities in Canada and the US, respectively.⁴ Finally, I also travelled briefly to New York City to conduct three interviews with YDEOs who were heavily involved in Ethiopian development initiatives and could therefore provide important insights for my research as key informants.

Thirty of my respondents were female and twenty-five were male. Their ages ranged from fifteen to thirty-five at the time of interviewing them, and roughly 75 percent of them were the children of people whose emigration was precipitated or made permanent by the 1974 revolution (this was a pattern that emerged in the process of analyzing my data). The respondents represent a purposive but non-probability sample of YDEOs from North America. I began my interviews with *information-rich* cases, which I found through my existing network and also by reaching out to high-profile individuals known for their engagement in Ethiopian development. *Snowballing* helped to expand the sample beyond my existing network. I advertised my research project through as many public community channels as possible and also relied heavily upon social media. I employed *opportunistic* sampling methods to follow new and unexpected leads, which kept me open to stakeholders and issues pertinent to my research that I had not considered at the design stage. I cannot and do not aim to speak to the experiences of all YDEOs in North America, so randomized and probable sampling was not necessary for my research design. I did, however, attempt to be as representative as possible within my purposive sample along axes of gender, religion, age, city, and ethnicity. While my sampling techniques proved a very effective method for my research, there were inevitably many people and perspectives that I did not have the opportunity to fully engage with because they

3 Abebe, “Building the Plane as You Fly It.”

4 Chacko, “Translocality in Washington, DC and Addis Ababa”; “Government of Canada Provides Funding to Ethiopian Association to Help Newcomers in Toronto”; “Festivity of the Ethiopian-Canadian Day Celebration in Toronto”; Lyons, “Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia”; Terrazas, “Beyond Regional Circularity”; Thompson “Ethnicity and Nationality among Ethiopians in Canada’s Census Data.”

were either not visible or readily accessible to me. These gaps warrant analysis and represent opportunities for further research.

The fact that YDEOs were born and/or raised outside of Ethiopia means that the socially constructed nature of their relationships to Ethiopia is more apparent than it would have been with migrants who spent their formative years in Ethiopia. However, the aim of my research was not only to establish that YDEO diasporic identities were socially constructed, but also to examine *how* these identities are constructed through various social practices—in this case, by engaging in Ethiopian development. Methodologically speaking, the “engagement in Ethiopian development” provided me with a concrete social practice that I could examine and made it safe to presume that the young people I interviewed had an active and meaningful connection to their Ethiopian heritage. The task of my research then became untangling the webs of significance that connected these social identities and practices, which is discussed further below.

First Generation Migration and Settlement Experience

The Ethiopian diaspora is a relatively new demographic group in the United States and Canada. There are certainly documented cases of Ethiopians travelling to North America in the early twentieth century, but it was not until the 1970s that a sizable diaspora community began to form.⁵ The foundation for this community was laid in the 1960s, as liberalized immigration policies in both the United States and Canada opened up work, study, and tourism opportunities for African nationals.⁶ These were the pioneers of the “New African Diaspora,” a term used to distinguish the experiences of contemporary African diaspora communities from those emanating from the transatlantic slave trade.⁷ Most of the Ethiopians travelling to North America in the 1960s, particularly to the United States, were pursuing education. These students were sponsored by either the Imperial Government under Emperor Haile Selassie, their affluent families, or through American

5 Getahun, *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900–2000*; Thompson, “Ethnicity and Nationality among Ethiopians in Canada’s Census Data.”

6 Creese, “The New African Diaspora in Vancouver”; Green and Green, “The Goals of Canada’s Immigration Policy”; Veney, “The Effects of Immigration and Refugee Policies on Africans in the United States.”

7 Nzegwu and Okpewho, *The New African Diaspora*; Zewde, Yntiso, and Berhanu, “The Ethiopian Diaspora and the Tigray Development Association.”

scholarship schemes.⁸ There were also some who arrived as tourists or to fulfil governmental duties.⁹ These Ethiopian nationals were small in number, almost exclusively representatives of the ultra-elite in Ethiopia, and most had intentions of eventually returning to Ethiopia.

The number and composition of the Ethiopian diaspora in North America would, however, begin to change dramatically in the 1970s. In 1974, a student-led movement escalated into a revolution that overthrew the imperial government and made way for a communist regime named the Derg. Under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam, this regime “unleashed a military and political reign of terror against its real and imagined opponents [and] also pursued socialist economic policies that reduced agricultural productivity and helped bring on famine, resulting in the deaths of untold tens of thousands of people.”¹⁰ The “Red Terror”—the Derg’s most enduring legacy—cost Ethiopia a generation of educated youth and professionals who were lost to murder, imprisonment, and forced migration. According to World Refugee Survey, there were 55,000 Ethiopian refugees worldwide in 1972, and by 1982 this figure jumped to 1,081,500.¹¹ The 1996 Canadian Census reports that only sixty-five Ethiopians arrived in Canada prior to 1976, and these same statistics showed that 21,591 Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Canada between 1974 and 1996.¹² These figures demonstrate that the Derg government was cataclysmic, particularly in driving out the young, elite, and educated class in Ethiopia during the 1970s and 1980s.

As Wiebel and Admasie describe it, so many people were forced into exile during the Derg period “that it contributed to the formation of a permanent Ethiopian diaspora.”¹³ However, significant numbers of refugees and migrants have continued to flow out of Ethiopia in the decades since the tumultuous years under the Derg. Subsequent waves to North America have included family reunifications, overstayed tourist visas, skilled migrants, US Diversity Lottery Visa winners, and groups fleeing political persecution under the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime (which came into power in 1991).¹⁴ These different waves of migration and

8 Getahun, *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900–2000*, 41.

9 Ibid.

10 Ofcansky and Berry, *Ethiopia*, 17.

11 Bariagaber, “Political Violence and the Uprooted in the Horn of Africa,” 31.

12 Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Inequality in the City of Toronto*; Fenta, Hyman, and Noh, “Determinants of Depression among Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in Toronto,” 364.

13 Wiebel and Admasie, “Rethinking the Ethiopian Red Terror,” 4.

14 Fransen and Kuschminder, *Migration in Ethiopia*; Lyons, “Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia”; Terrazas, “Beyond Regional

settlement have added to cultural, linguistic, and religious distinctions to produce a very heterogeneous Ethiopian diaspora. It is, therefore, important to reflect upon the constitutive and fluid nature of and relationship between pre-migration experiences and the post-migration social lives and practices constructed by Ethiopian immigrants and their descendants.

As mentioned, the majority of my respondents emerged as children of the Derg-precipitated wave of Ethiopians who settled in North America. This is unsurprising given the focus of my research. My interest in people who were born and/or raised in North America and were old enough to engage in Ethiopian development/charitable activities narrowed the pool of research candidates primarily to children of people who immigrated in the 1970s and 1980s. This maps right on to the time when Ethiopian emigration was dominated by people fleeing the Derg regime. YDEO descriptions of the migration, settlement, and lived experiences of their parents were very consistent with each other, and often included the following common characteristics. Their parents:

- Were among the elite and educated class in Ethiopia;
- Were forced migrants or became exiled after the revolution;
- Were among the first Ethiopians to settle in their North American cities;
- Have many family members in Ethiopia whom they regularly speak with and support through remittances;
- Were critical of the Ethiopian government (both the Derg as well as the EPRDF regime under the late Meles Zenawi);
- Placed a high value on education when raising their children; and
- Eventually moved into the middle class in North America, usually after a period of financial and social struggle.

These observations are mirrored in the small but growing body of literature documenting the experiences of this first wave of Ethiopian immigrants to North America and the households and communities they have established.¹⁵ For example, Kebede's work on the second-generation Ethiopian diaspora in Washington, DC focused on children of Ethiopian immigrants who arrived in the US before the 1990s.¹⁶ Kebede notes that most of his respondents' parents were of high socioeconomic status in Ethiopia prior to emigration; and further, "these first-generation immigrants were able

Circularity"; Thompson "Ethnicity and Nationality among Ethiopians in Canada's Census Data"; Zewde, Yntiso, and Berhanu, "The Ethiopian Diaspora and the Tigray Development Association."

15 Chacko, "Translocality in Washington, DC and Addis Ababa"; Goitom, "Living in Our Own World"; Kebede, "The African Second Generation in the United States"; Kebede, "Ethiopia Is Misunderstood."

16 Kebede, "Ethiopia Is Misunderstood."

to reconstitute their middle-income status and transnational community in the host country, which shaped the socio-economic opportunities and achievements of the second-generation.”¹⁷ However, this was usually after a prolonged and turbulent settlement period marked by challenges associated with establishing a life, career, and community as a new and racialized immigrant group. These challenges included low incomes, exclusion, and discrimination, strained social relations, and poor mental health outcomes, among others.¹⁸ Some segments of the Ethiopian diaspora, particularly those who arrived in North America with transferable social capital, were able to establish themselves in the middle class despite these structural barriers and constraints. The social, political, and economic history of this first wave of Ethiopian immigrants, as outlined above, serves as a primer for understanding the lives of their children, who were raised in North America. While these are not deterministic forces, they do shape YDEO social landscapes and inform their transnational orientations in analytically important and interesting ways.

YDEO Social Landscapes and Identities

The “migrant descendant”¹⁹ literature is a growing body of work within diaspora and transnationalism studies. Much of this research focuses on what is often referred to as the “second-generation,” the standard definition of which “applies to children of at least one immigrant parent who were born and/or raised in the country that their parent(s) settled.”²⁰ The classic second-generation concept used by scholars has often included the

17 Ibid., 247.

18 Fenta, Hyman, and Noh, “Determinants of Depression among Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in Toronto”; Fenta, Hyman, Rourke, Moon, and Noh, “Somatic Symptoms in a Community Sample of Ethiopian Immigrants in Toronto, Canada”; Hyman, Guruge, and Mason, “The Impact of Migration on Marital Relationships”; Kebede, “The African Second Generation in the United States”; Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Inequality in the City of Toronto*.

19 The term “migrant descendant” could in fact apply to anyone if it were interpreted loosely since most people can trace their ancestry to a person who migrated from another part of the world. However, I use the term in this chapter to refer primarily to the early descendants (i.e., first and second genealogical generations) of migrants, who were born and/or raised in the country of settlement. There are instances where I use other terms, such as “second-generation,” when this is the term used by the author whose work is being referenced.

20 Hernandez-Ramdwar, “From T.T. to T.O,” 43.

“one-point-five generation,” that is, those born in their parents’ country of origin but raised in the country of settlement.²¹ Migrant descendant studies have played a critical role in deconstructing ideas around cultural identity, citizenship, and belonging. This work is largely based upon qualitative ethnographic research, which provides visibility to individual narratives and adds nuance and depth to theoretical discussions. The analysis has shifted from narrow debates about competing assimilation theories to explorations into the complexity of identity and community formation as well as transnational ties and practices.²² Taking things at face value, we might be tempted to surmise that “when children are brought up in households that are regularly influenced by people, objects, practices and know-how from their ancestral homes, they are socialized into its norms and values and they learn how to negotiate its institutions.”²³ However, this only tells part of the story.

Immigrant parents often go to great lengths to pass on their traditions, religious practices, languages, and/or cultural norms to their foreign-born progeny. However, migrant descendants respond to the socializing efforts of their parents in different and often contradictory ways depending on their life stage and other psychosocial events. For example, some may be at pains to demonstrate their cultural “authenticity” in order to seek approval from their parents and community members, others may choose to rebel or distance themselves from what they perceive to be irrelevant or restrictive norms and practices, while others may move fluidly and strategically between various cultural milieus. These responses vary from person to person, as well as from stage to stage in the same person’s life. Kebede argues that while second-generation Africans in the United States “are often the strongest custodians of their African heritages,” they cannot be described as “mere reflections of their parents” either.²⁴ In their work focused on young British- and American-born people of Egyptian ancestry, Saey and Skey also point to overlapping identities and processes of socialization.²⁵ Saey and Skey’s respondents explained that their families played an important role in cultivating an awareness of and connection to Egyptian culture; however, many respondents also adopted a wider pan-Arab identity due in large part to the

21 Levitt and Waters, *The Changing Face of Home*, 12.

22 Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration”; Kebede, “The African Second Generation in the United States”; Levitt, “Roots and Routes”; Levitt and Waters, *The Changing Face of Home*; Portes, *The New Second Generation*; Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*; Wessendorf, “Roots Migrants.”

23 Levitt, “Roots and Routes,” 1225.

24 Kebede, “The African Second Generation in the United States,” 130.

25 Saey and Skey, “The Politics of Trans-National Belonging.”

impact of geopolitical events including 9/11 and the Iraq war.²⁶ Arthur speaks to the impact of mainstream perceptions of Black communities on the identities that “second-generation” African girls choose or adopt: “No matter their countries of origination, the second-generation girls perceive that their blackness serves as the main marker, a common physical trait that will determine whether they will have limited or equal integration or incorporation into the core society.”²⁷

As the authors cited above demonstrate, the sociocultural experiences of immigrant parents are very important forces in the lives of their children. There are, however, many other factors that also shape the orientations and life trajectories of migrant descendants, such as the YDEOs with whom I spoke. Family was indeed important as both a socializing force and mode of cultural transmission. For example, Winta (female, mid-thirties, DC)²⁸ described how being exposed to her parents’ Ethiopian social life helped to create a sense of familiarity and affinity to a particular interpretation of Ethiopian culture and issues later in her own life:

When we were growing up, my parents never said, “Oh, you know, our Ethiopian friends are here you guys go play somewhere else.” We were very much part of all the get togethers, dinner conversations, all of that. Even if it meant me saying constantly like, “what, wait, what did you say? Mindin newh?”²⁹ Tell me again.” . . . It was a way to have a community in a sort of Midwestern, predominately White city that we were then living in.

Teodros (male, mid-twenties, Toronto) expressed a sense of nationalistic pride towards Ethiopia that was far more pronounced than other YDEOs who grew up in North America. He spoke about the impact that his grandfather had in inculcating this patriotic orientation:

So, my understanding of Ethiopia was based on [my grandfather] because he volunteered to fight in Somalia. He left his kids and fought for his country. There was an incredible amount of honor in him being Ethiopian, he felt it had to be defended at all cost. . . . If I do 5 percent of what my grandfather did for his country, I would die happy.

As these narratives illustrate, there is often a strong relationship between the lives of YDEOs and the experiences of their parents. However, this relationship is not deterministic and can often play out in unpredictable ways.

26 Ibid., 64.

27 Arthur, *African Diaspora Identities*, 167.

28 My respondents are referenced throughout this chapter using pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. I also list their approximate age at the time of our interview, as well as the location where our interview took place.

29 Mindin newh is an Amharic phrase meaning “what is it?”

My respondents did not simply absorb and adopt the views and practices of their parents, but often chose to reinterpret, ignore, or reject them instead. There were many examples illustrating the role of agency and the impact of the wider socio-political context in shaping YDEO decisions and lives, particularly as they relate to cultural norms around race and gender. For example, many of my respondents' parents were very politically active and embedded within Ethiopian diaspora communities where they settled (at least initially), likely due to the fact that they were among the first wave of Ethiopian diaspora to these cities. However, somewhat counterintuitively, these parents often discouraged their children from doing the same and preferred that they focus on their education instead. While these YDEOs rarely expressed interest in the Ethiopian networks and institutions built by their parents, they often longed for and became engaged in communities and initiatives that brought other YDEOs together—and often did this with or without their parents' support. Organizations that were run by other YDEOs played an important role in creating community, as they fostered a sense of belonging and acceptance that was less complicated and contingent than both traditional Ethiopian community spaces and mainstream North American spaces.

In addition, my respondents' parents rarely played an active role in cultivating their racial identity; if anything, they often promoted a form of Ethiopian exceptionalism and worked to de-emphasize their children's "Blackness." However, YDEOs often developed a Black racial identity on their own, which was born out of both negative experiences with discrimination and positive associations with Black history and culture in North America. Berthelemy argues that the histories and experiences of Black American peers can play an important role in shaping second-generation Africans' construction of Blackness.³⁰ For my respondents, peer influence, media discourse, and political education provided them with a lens to interpret and create meaning out of their own encounters with racial social structures and barriers. As discussed, while the parents of most of my respondents were among the elite in Ethiopia, they arrived in North America as refugees and initially found themselves at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. Their families often started off in under-resourced neighborhoods, and YDEO experiences with economic marginalization were compounded by encounters with systemic and flagrant racism, which chipped away at their sense of belonging within North America. Most identified with some form of Blackness, however there was a great deal of diversity in terms of how accentuated this was among their other social and cultural identities and

30 Berthelemy, "Second-Generation African College Students and the American Ethnoracial Pentagon."

how easily they found a sense of belonging and acceptance among other Black and African American/Canadian communities. Ultimately, they were generally racially homogenized in the North American contexts where they grew up despite this diversity of experience.

As early immigrants from a relatively conservative and religious society (of various faiths), many of my respondents' parents held perspectives about gender and sexuality that were more defined and restrictive than those in North America. For example, females were often under more family and community surveillance than their male counterparts and were expected to present themselves as demure and chaste. However, as with most young people, YDEOs rarely took their parents' perspectives at face value, but rather negotiated, challenged, and often rebelled against the gendered views and expectations of their families and community:

I think in a lot of ways I have shifted away from what I would have thought is Ethiopian. I don't know if that's a good thing or bad thing. But I'm a lot more accepting of things that I would not normally be accepting of [such as homosexuality] (Emnet: female, late-twenties, DC).

I am more outgoing and talkative, I'm not shy, I speak more openly on [taboo] issues and these are disconnects. . . . I don't want others like me to think they are less Ethiopian because of their differences. The majority of my life I felt like I wasn't Ethiopian enough. Now that I'm older I've decided to think that's ok (Ruth: female, late-twenties, Toronto).

What is interesting about Emnet's and Ruth's accounts is not only how they are wrestling with their conceptions of gender and sexuality, but how that process is also intertwined with their negotiations of some form of an Ethiopian identity. This demonstrates just how layered and fluid social identities are in general. However, identity processes are particularly complex for migrant descendants, like YDEOs, whose everyday "inbetweenness" requires that they confront the questions "*who am I?*" and "*where do I belong?*" more often than many other social groups.

Claiming an "Ethiopian identity" can be even more problematic for YDEOs who come from communities that have experienced exclusion within Ethiopian contexts, such as Oromo communities. While Ethiopia is an incredibly heterogeneous country, markers of Ethiopian identity that receive public validation are often those that reflect the languages and customs of the Highland groups (Amhara and Tigrayan), which have historically held most of the political and economic power in Ethiopia.³¹ Lelisa (female, early

31 It is worth noting that contemporary social and political movements in Ethiopia are changing the landscape as it relates to the power and visibility of

thirties, New York) described the challenges she faced as she attempted to establish then reconcile both an Ethiopian and Oromo identity:

I took a Human Rights course freshman or sophomore year, and I did my paper on the Oromo case for self-determination, and I delved really deep into research and scholarship and that's where my identity crisis came from (*laughing*). Like, I did not know we were this oppressed within the general Ethiopian culture. . . . When I graduated, I went back to Ethiopia for a year because: A) it had been eleven years, I had never been back since I had left; B) I needed to reconcile my identity issues cause I went from "Miss Ethiopia" (*laughing*) to just questioning everything about what it means to be Ethiopian and not even claiming it you know?

As Lelisa's account reveals, once YDEOs decide to deconstruct their Ethiopian identities, or have encounters that do so for them, reconstructing them can take a lot of hard work. They cannot lean upon memories and relationships in Ethiopia with the same ease of their parents' generation, nor can they construct a sense of belonging without encountering cultural gatekeepers. In the following section, I discuss ways in which YDEOs negotiate their place in the world through transnational practices that establish, test, and complicate their ties to Ethiopia.

YDEO Transnational Practices

For children and descendants of migrants, questions of belonging can be particularly complex and even painful, especially for racialized people who might not have the option of "blending in" to their North American contexts. For many of my respondents, their ability to claim a close ancestral connection to Ethiopia was an important part of their orientation and sense of place in the world. However, most of them were not born or raised in Ethiopia, had very little if any Ethiopian language skills, and did not sufficiently conform to cultural prescriptions and norms. Their sense of belonging within the Ethiopian diaspora was often either tenuous or disrupted by gatekeepers who challenged the authenticity of their affiliation. Feelings of alienation were commonly expressed by YDEOs as they spoke about their interactions with others in the diaspora who charged them with not being "Ethiopian enough." Many of them found ways to make peace with this, such as Tarik (male, late-thirties, New York), who stated: "I accept this marginalization." Yet the YDEOs would often seek out experiences and relationships that brought them culturally and physically closer to Ethiopia. They

other ethno-cultural groups, including Oromo communities.

described searching for an “authentic” Ethiopian experience in the hope that it might fill gaps in their cultural knowledge and aid in their efforts to belong. For these individuals, engaging in development often provided an opportunity to connect with other Ethiopians in a way that was concrete and legitimized, and drew praise rather than scrutiny from the community.

In the migrant descendant literature, there is still much uncertainty about if, why, and how these groups connect with their countries of origin and engage in transnational practices. For example, in their seminal work on the transnational lives of the second generation, Levitt and Waters express an appreciation for the value in examining migrant descendant homeland ties and transnational practices; however, they also appeal to common sense notions that would suggest that these ties and practices will be less “frequent” and “intense” than those of adult migrants.³² However, as my research with YDEOs demonstrates, the relationships that migrant descendants forge with their countries of origin are *different* than those of their migrant parents, not necessarily *diminished*. In order to understand the scope and depth of transnationalism among migrant descendants, we need to step away from the hierarchy of transnational practices that implicitly shapes much of the mainstream discourse and literature. Sending remittances is not necessarily a reflection of a stronger or more “legitimate” personal connection to the homeland than organizing a party to fundraise for a development project through a student club. Further, measuring the frequency of migrant descendant transnational practices (or lack thereof) offers less insight than examining when and why they do so in relation to different stages of their life and wider events happening around the world. When we take migrant descendant narratives and practices at face value, we gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and also expand our theoretical understanding of diasporas and transnationalism more broadly. In fact, Tölölyan argues that diasporas only begin to emerge “when affect is no longer enough or natural . . . which come[s] no earlier than the second and third generations, when it becomes obvious to the diaspora that it can no longer presume an automatically shared ‘sameness’ with the people in the homeland.”³³ As such, the point at which a group of people connect to the ancestral country as a matter of *choice* rather than *consequence* is particularly significant to diaspora studies from an analytical perspective.

The life trajectories of my respondents differed in innumerable ways; however, their experiences were connected by this shared and transnational history that shaped their identifications with Ethiopia and ultimately factored in their decisions to engage in Ethiopian transnational practices. As

32 Levitt and Waters, *The Changing Face of Home*, 12.

33 Tölölyan, “The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies,” 650.

discussed, the transnational practices that were the focus of my research included YDEO engagement with Ethiopian development and charitable initiatives. These included activities based in North America or Ethiopia that were intended to contribute towards the social, political, and/or economic development of Ethiopia. Some examples of these activities include the following:

- Creating virtual platforms to mobilize development funds and raise issue awareness;
- Creating an investment firm to seed local Ethiopian businesses;
- Providing pro-bono legal advice to a local Ethiopian human rights organization;
- Going on a faith-based mission trip that included visiting orphanages;
- Working at an Ethiopian branch of an INGO or multilateral organization;
- Auctioning art in the US to fund programs for children with HIV in Ethiopia;
- Partnering with corporations in North America to send school supplies to Ethiopia; and
- Taking a sabbatical to work as a medical doctor in a rural Ethiopian hospital.

A range of factors, including the availability of resources and personal skills and interests, influenced the methods and media of engagement chosen by individual YDEOs. Some of these activities were organized within the Ethiopian diaspora community and, at other times, they were facilitated by mainstream organizations. My analysis is less concerned with the efficacy of these efforts in bringing about the espoused change or “development” and more focused on the psychosocial and cultural processes that are at play through these social practices. To be precise, I examine the development of YDEO lives as a result of their efforts to develop Ethiopia.

My respondents were motivated by a desire to take an approach to Ethiopian development that was different from both their parents’ generation and mainstream Western development organizations. In most cases, YDEOs landed somewhere in the middle by drawing on networks, ideas, and resources from both of these sources. Patriotic appeals to “support the motherland” did not resonate with YDEOs as much as broad social justice and pan-African discourses, which were more accessible and relatable to them. Some respondents conceptualized Ethiopia in classic and parochial nationalist terms. For example, Bewnet (male, early-twenties, DC) stated that he worried for Ethiopia “like a mother worries for her child,” which was very similar to the following statement made by Amina (female, late-twenties, DC): “I am Ethiopian first, and whatever I’m doing I plan to give back to Ethiopia as I would my own mother as she grows older.” However,

most YDEOs were wary of uninhibited expressions of “love” for Ethiopia as a *nation*. They were aware and critical of the ways in which Ethiopian nationalist discourses have served exclusionary agendas and created conflict in the region and in the diaspora. My respondents were generally passionate about supporting Ethiopian development, however they were less likely than their parents to support an initiative on the basis of its regional location or ethnic affinity, and often made a conscious effort to characterize their own initiatives as pan-Ethiopian, pan-African, or even cosmopolitan.³⁴ YDEOs were inspired by appeals to global social justice and the promise of an African renaissance and distanced themselves from Ethiopian nationalism and rhetoric that they viewed as politicized. They often sought to recast their love for Ethiopia as an allegiance to “the people” rather than the state and spoke about their sense of responsibility as an expression of a depoliticized affinity to the country. Some respondents took their critiques of Ethiopian nationalism further than others depending on factors such as their age, access to critical studies education, and time spent in Ethiopia itself.

Aida (female, early thirties, Toronto), for example, was very active in Ethiopian development initiatives based in Toronto. She differentiated between what she termed “Ethiopia-the-head” (i.e., state, politics, nationalism), and “Ethiopia-the-heart” (i.e., the people), and she characterized her service to Ethiopia as a commitment to “the heart.”³⁵ In a similar research project on second-generation Ethiopian diasporans in Washington, DC, Kebede found that his respondents were also averse to Ethiopian diaspora political activities:

They describe first-generation politics, right and left, as “too partisan,”

34 As recently as 2021, significant social movements were gathering pace, fuelled by young people from Oromo communities in both Ethiopia and the diaspora. A focused study of young diasporans engaged in these movements who identify as Oromo will likely tell a very different story than those interviewed for my research, including a fervent commitment to specific political and ethno-national projects. For seminal work on Oromo youth in the diaspora, see: Kumsa “Sieves and Reeds”; and Kumsa, “‘No! I’m Not a Refugee!’” The political shifts and violence unfolding in the Northern region of Tigray in Ethiopia since early 2021 have also been igniting ethno-national movements and campaigns in the diaspora across generations. New research is needed to better understand the nature of these emerging transnational social movements and identities.

35 My interviews took place prior to 2018, which is when Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali took over as Prime Minister of Ethiopia. The Prime Minister has been employing nationalistic rhetoric to animate and mobilize support both within the country and the diaspora. It is quite possible that YDEOs’ reticence towards a state-centric relationship with Ethiopia may have relaxed or shifted under this new government; future research is needed to explore this.

“raw,” driven very much by the “unlimited horsepower of emotionalism” as Emu put it. For the second-generation respondents, it has been “too divided, too vitriolic.” Asfaw called it “dirty tribal stuff with no real impact for the last 50 years . . . [it] provides false information to the community.”³⁶

This sentiment was echoed among my respondents over and over again. As the children of parents who had often been exiled under the Derg, they regularly witnessed a form of transnational engagement that was highly politicized and divisive. This stood at odds with their cosmopolitan sensibilities and the influence of a Western liberal arts education, and so YDEOs often went to great lengths to position their own transnational efforts as a response to *needs* rather than *politics*. Engaging in these development activities offered space for YDEOs to envision and work towards creating a less political, more equitable, and more prosperous Ethiopia; and this animated their relationships to the country and its people.

As children born and/or raised in North America, the ties that YDEOs had to Ethiopia were generally loose and ambiguous when they were growing up. As such, my respondents often described their motivations for engaging in Ethiopian development as an opportunity to explore, test, or build a sense of connection to Ethiopia. This highlights the socially constructed nature of diasporic affinities and identities and challenges the notion that diaspora-homeland practices are primordially motivated. YDEOs often found themselves in a position where they had an ascribed or adopted association with Ethiopia that they felt needed to be substantiated:

Even though my parents were not emphasizing to me, “you’re Ethiopian, you’re Ethiopian,” my school was, and my peers. Because I went to a private school, I was the only Black student and the only Ethiopian student. So, they would also emphasize, “oh give us the African perspective,” or “oh you’re Ethiopian what’s it like?” And then I think because regardless of whether I labeled myself as Ethiopian they did, I thought ok, I better know, outside of what my family taught me, I’ve gotta go there and see it (Elsa: female, mid-twenties, Toronto).

Not understanding my connection to Ethiopia really created uncertainty in me. Because I started a business here [in Toronto], I hustled and made money, and things were as great as they could be. . . . So, I was comfortable, but always something—it still tells me, I don’t know what it is, it’s like you belong there. Have I figured out a full answer for it, no. But going to Ethiopia allowed me to see that there could be a purpose, there could be a reason (Teodros: male, mid-twenties, Toronto).

In both of these cases, it was a desire to deepen their connections to Ethiopia that motivated these YDEOs to travel to Ethiopia and engage in Ethiopian

36 Kebede, “The African Second Generation in the United States,” 257.

development. Similarly, Saey and Skey found that some second-generation Egyptians felt that their prolonged engagement in the Egyptian uprisings in Cairo had helped them to “earn” an Egyptian identity and increase their sense of belonging in Egypt.³⁷ Like these experiences in Egypt, YDEO engagements in Ethiopian development were not simply technical interventions; they were fundamentally social processes defined by social interactions.

In the process of organizing fundraising events, volunteering at orphanages, and working on project reports, YDEOs were also building personal connections, gaining social capital, and redefining attitudes towards their families, communities, development, and Ethiopia itself. Overall, engaging in Ethiopian development played an important role in facilitating YDEO constructions and expressions of an Ethiopian diasporic identity. For some of my respondents, the country that once seemed so distant and inaccessible suddenly came to life, and for others like Selam (female, late-thirties, Toronto), their existing conceptions of Ethiopia became complicated as they grew more familiar with the country:

I just said, why am I here [in Ethiopia]? And if the answer is because emotionally, I wanted to identify and see if I was Ethiopian, the romanticism of Ethiopia is gone! The question for me about identity, it's irrelevant now. I am Ethiopian, in my own form. No one will define that for me. If I don't speak the language fluently—so what? If I haven't lived there—so what? I define it for me. And Alpha, for me, that was a huuuge monkey off my back and so liberating!

Over the course of her time in Ethiopia, Selam grew increasingly frustrated with various aspects of the country, particularly the gender norms and barriers she encountered as a young woman in male-dominated professional circles. Selam ultimately chose to leave Ethiopia and returned to Toronto, and at the time that we spoke she was still deciding where she was going to settle in the long term. While these experiences she described were negative, it liberated her from the sense of inadequacy that she had held on to for so long. As she explained: “The people that said I was not Ethiopian—I didn't want to be their Ethiopian.”

Conclusion

As Schuetz argues in his classical work on the sociology of everyday life, there is a familiarity and intimacy that characterizes the ways in which one moves through the world when one feels “at home”:

37 Saey and Skey, “The Politics of Trans-National Belonging,” 70.

Life at home follows an organized pattern of routine; it has its well-determined goals and well-proved means to bring them about, consisting of a set of traditions, habits, institutions, timetables for activities of all kinds, etc. Most of the problems of daily life can be mastered by following this pattern. There is no need to define or redefine situations which have occurred so many times or to look for new solutions of old problems hitherto handled satisfactorily.³⁸

However, the matter of “home” and belonging was far more problematic for my respondents and required a more deliberate approach to social situations and challenges. The YDEOs I spoke with were the first cohort of people born to Ethiopian immigrants and raised in North America. They could not, therefore, rely on their parents or previous cohorts of YDEOs to provide a clear social blueprint as they navigated their everyday lives. Common points of reference, such as home, nationality, language, and social norms, were complicated and open to question, and their approach to everyday problem-solving included trial and error combinations of various social tools, frameworks, and capital. YDEOs drew from their parents’ narratives, their Western education, media representations, their experiences with racism and discrimination, and global development discourse as they interpreted and responded to various encounters and opportunities in their daily lives. My respondents were close enough to an Ethiopian lived experience that it featured prominently in their socialization and everyday cultural milieu, yet far enough that there was often a cultural and linguistic disconnect between them and wider Ethiopian communities. In addition, their parents migrated from Ethiopia at a similar time and under similar circumstances, meaning that their imaginations of Ethiopia were shaped by personal stories and oral histories that were similar in tone and substance.

Much like for anyone else, adolescence and young adulthood were often a turbulent period for YDEOs, marked by uncertainty and existential angst. While their daily concerns and experiences may not have been particularly remarkable, they took on a particularly active and conscious role in fashioning the infrastructure of their sociocultural worlds as they were living them. YDEO relationships to Ethiopia were important to the composition of these sociocultural worlds. These relationships were defined both by their circumstantial ancestral ties to Ethiopia, as well as an active and iterative process of negotiating a relationship to the country. Transnational practices featured prominently in this process, which, in the case of my research, included engaging in Ethiopian development and charitable efforts. These engagements were not instinctive responses to their ancestral connection to Ethiopia. Rather, YDEO development practices were generally an effort to

38 Schuetz, “The Homecomer,” 370.

explore and identify with Ethiopia, and it was in and through such practices that their ancestral connection was imbued with meaning and endowed as a salient part of their personal identity.

This chapter has only been able to scratch the surface of complexity found within Ethiopian diasporas and the transnational social fields that connect them with Ethiopia, its institutions, and its peoples. The relatively recent nature of mass Ethiopian migration and settlement abroad provides a unique opportunity to document and analyze these varied experiences and social processes as they unfold. It is my hope that future research will include accounts of other YDEO cohorts whose experiences are grounded in unique migration, settlement, and sociocultural histories. Not only will this be an important empirical contribution to an understudied population, but the ability also to compare across distinct YDEO generations will surely yield rich theoretical insights for diaspora, migrant descendant, and Ethiopian studies at large.

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Part Two

Geographies of Migration:
Mapping the Global
Ethiopian Diaspora

Chapter 4

Im/mobile Lives?

Ethiopian Domestic Workers in the Middle East

Marina de Regt

Introduction

Zemzem¹ is a young Ethiopian woman in her early twenties who had lived several years in the Middle East. When we met in a small café on Bole Road, she was dressed in a black *abaya*, her hair covered with a head scarf, and accompanied by her brother and his wife. Zemzem's young and timid appearance disguised her extensive life story, and when she began to talk, she hardly came to a halt. Born in a village in the south of Ethiopia, she grew up with an aunt in Addis Ababa because her parents were unable to provide for her. When she was sixteen years old, Zemzem migrated to Qatar to take up paid domestic work for an Indian family. When her employers went on pilgrimage to Mecca, she joined them but got lost at the Kaaba, between hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. She stayed in Saudi Arabia, had numerous jobs, and was deported during the large-scale deportation campaign of the Saudi government in 2013. When we interviewed her in August 2014, Zemzem was living with her brothers in Addis Ababa and desperately looking for a job. She would like to set up her own business, but if that did not work out, she was planning to migrate again.

Zemzem is one of the millions of Ethiopian women who have migrated as domestic workers to the Middle East in the past twenty years, and in doing so have become part of the Ethiopian diaspora. While labor migration was restricted under the socialist regime of Mengistu, freedom of movement has become a constitutional right under the government that came

1 Zemzem is a fictive name, just like the other names used in this chapter.

to power in 1991. Ethiopia has become one of the main “sending countries” of domestic workers to the oil-rich countries on the Arabian Peninsula and to Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt (see de Regt 2010; Fernandez 2010; 2020; Minaye 2012). In this chapter, I will use the experiences of young Ethiopian women who migrated to the Middle East to study issues of mobility and immobility. The public discourse in Ethiopia about women’s migration to the Middle East emphasizes women’s immobility; many spend their lives in the houses of their employers and face abuse and exploitation. Yet, a closer look at their life stories shows the many different instances of mobility and the moments in which they are able to exert some agency, albeit under restricted circumstances. My aim in this chapter is to show that a situation of seemingly extreme immobility still offers possibilities for mobility. I think that such a view is of utmost importance in the public debate about migrant domestic workers, in particular in the Middle East but also in other parts of the world (see also Fernandez and de Regt 2014, 14–15).

My theoretical outlook draws on discussions about gender, migration, mobility, and immobility, in particular in relation to migrant domestic work. My contribution to these discussions is threefold. First, I want to add gender and age, and in particular their intersection, as important axes of difference to the study of migration and mobility. Migration is predominantly a youthful activity, with people in their early and mid-twenties forming the biggest group of migrants. While there is an increasing body of literature about young people’s migration aspirations and experiences, gender is often lacking as an analytical lens. Most studies focus on boys and young men, and when girls and young women are included, gender is not explored in detail. The migration of girls is very often framed in discourses around trafficking and sexual exploitation, which leaves little room for the girls’ agency (See Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2005; Huijsmans 2011; Grabska et al. 2019). Second, I would like to add a life course perspective to the academic debate around migrant domestic work. Most studies on migrant domestic workers focus on their living and working conditions and emphasize their restricted mobility. Yet, when we study women’s life stories, and their migration trajectories, it not only becomes clear that domestic workers are much more mobile than perceived but also that domestic work is often performed in a particular phase of life. Third, I argue that we need to move beyond a binary framework of mobility versus immobility, as women can be both mobile and immobile simultaneously.

The chapter is based on thirty interviews with Ethiopian women who migrated to the Middle East when they were under eighteen years old and who had returned to Addis Ababa. Twenty-four of them were eighteen to twenty-four years of age at the time of the interview and six of them were over the age of twenty-four. Some of them had first migrated from rural

areas and towns to Addis Ababa, and later went abroad. Although international migration is not officially permitted under the age of eighteen, many adolescent girls manage to obtain false identity papers or migrate without any documents, including even girls as young as thirteen years of age (Jones et al. 2014). Fifteen of our interviewees were deported from Saudi Arabia at the end of 2013 in a large-scale deportation campaign (see de Regt and Tafesse 2015; Lecadet and Melkamu 2016). The interviews were part of a larger research project on the migration of adolescent girls in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Sudan (Grabska et al. 2019).² The research focused on the experiences, life choices, and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women who migrate internally and internationally. It specifically looked at the life course and at how the decision to migrate intersects with other important choices, which characterize adolescence. By examining choices related to education, marriage, and having children the study intends to provide insights into adolescent girls' aspirations and decision-making capacity as well as into changes in their status resulting from their migration. We used a qualitative methodology, consisting of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with girls who migrated to Addis Ababa and the Middle East when they were under eighteen years of age. Data were collected by a team of Ethiopian researchers. In the case of returnees from the Middle East, the interviewees were selected by the two Ethiopian researchers, both of whom had close connections with returned women as they had both undertaken research for their Masters theses about this topic.³

I will first give a short overview of discussions in the field of gender, migration, and mobility, with special reference to migrant domestic workers. I will then zoom in on five phases that are relevant to the analysis of young women's migration as domestic servants and highlight instances of mobility and immobility. These five phases are chronologically structured: I start with the decision to migrate; I then discuss working and living conditions in the country of migration followed by the phase of returning home or moving on. After that I discuss deportation and finally the social status of returnees.

2 The research was funded by the Swiss Network of International Studies (SNIS) and carried out in collaboration with Terre des Hommes, Girl Effect Ethiopia, Refugee and Migration Studies Unit at the University of Dhaka, and the Ahfad University for Women in Omdurman, Sudan.

3 Aynadis Yohannes studied the factors contributing to irregular migration to the Middle East in Wollo and Medareshaw Tafesse studied the reintegration of deportees from Saudi Arabia after the mass deportation campaign in 2013/2014. Both are graduates of Addis Ababa University.

Gender, Mobility, and Domestic Work

In the past three decades a large body of scholarship has appeared in the field of gender and migration (see for overviews Silvey 2004; Mahler and Pessar 2006). While migration studies were classically gender blind, feminist scholars have shown the gender dynamics of spatial mobility by studying, amongst other things, decision-making processes around migration in households, the gender and generational hierarchies involved, the different meanings of migration for women and men, and the gendered causes and consequences of migration. Power is inevitable in the study of gender and migration. In her book *Space, Place and Gender* Massey (1994) speaks of “differential mobility”: it is not only important who moves and who does not, or when they move and how, but also “how mobility and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power” (Massey 1994, 150). The mobility and control of some groups weaken the mobility of other people, according to Massey.

Mobility is often equated with power and immobility with lack of power, and subsequently mobility is viewed as positive and immobility as negative (Hanson 2010, 9–10; Salazar and Smart 2011; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). In questions of gender relations, for instance, the dominant idea is that men are privileged because they are often more mobile than women; they are, for example, more active in the public domain, they have paid work outside of the house, and they travel more often. Yet, we should question the assumption that mobility is positive. When and where is mobility a choice or a constraint? How much agency is involved? What does it mean to be mobile and what does it mean to be immobile? And, even more importantly, we should move beyond binary thinking in the study of mobility and instead “address the relationship between mobility and immobility, localization and transnational connection, experiences and imaginaries of migration, and rootedness and cosmopolitan openness” (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 183). Does immobility, for example, engender possibilities for mobility, or vice versa?

These questions are particularly interesting for the study of migrant domestic workers. As mentioned in the introduction, in public discourses in Ethiopia the immobility of migrant domestic workers is emphasized; women and girls would be forced to leave their families, lured into migration by traffickers and brokers, and confined to the house of their employers in the country of migration. In their case, being mobile, moving from one place to another would therefore lead to extreme immobility. Yet, “no spatiality is inherently with or without power” (Gilbert 1998, 596), in line with Lefebvre’s theory on the production of social space (1991 [1974]). According to Lefebvre, space is a social product and serves as a tool of thought and of action. Space can be a means of control and is thus closely

related to power and domination (Lefebvre 1991, 26). Social relations project themselves into space, and space in turn reproduces and shapes social relations. Power is therefore intrinsically linked to spatiality. In relation to the study of (im)mobility, our task as scholars is to unravel how spatiality, (im)mobility and power are related. In order to study these relations, we need to clarify what we mean by the terms “mobility” and “immobility” and analyze what they mean at different stages in the migration process and which possibilities these stages give for different degrees of mobility and immobility. Mobility and immobility can be empowering for people in certain situations, while they can be considered oppressive for others in similar situations. Regarding gender and mobility, Hanson (2010, 11) makes a plea for “detailed understandings of the gendered meanings and power relations embedded in various forms of mobility/immobility in various social and geographic contexts.” Whereas Hanson uses the term mobility only for geographic and spatial movements, I prefer to use a much broader definition of mobility, which also includes social mobility and life course mobility, inspired by Urry’s seminal work on mobilities (2007). In a similar vein, immobility is not merely related to spatiality but also refers to one’s social position and one’s position in course of one’s life, as explored in this chapter.

So how does this work in the case of migrant domestic workers and in particular young and adolescent girl migrants? As I will show in the following sections, for most adolescent girl migrants, leaving home is the first act of mobility, which is usually an intentional act, even if the decision to leave is a product of constrained choices. Mobility is often severely constrained upon arrival by the confiscation of passports, which is standard practice amongst employers in the Middle East. Restrictions on mobility are further reinforced by employers’ injunctions against women’s physical movements both inside and outside the house in which they are employed (Fernandez and de Regt 2014, 14). Yet, this does not mean that they are completely immobile: the interview material shows the different degrees in which domestic workers are mobile, even under severely constrained circumstances.

When we study migrant domestic workers over a longer period of time, and include a life course perspective in our analysis, we are able to study not only the different degrees of mobility and immobility involved, along with the ways in which they are interconnected, but also the fact that “domestic worker” is not a fixed identity; indeed, domestic work is often a temporary form of employment. In the past, domestic work may have been a lifelong profession, but nowadays women often only perform paid domestic work in a particular phase in their lives. I therefore urge scholars to study people’s life courses, which will, in turn, enable us to analyze the different phases of mobility and immobility (see also Kalir 2014; Grabska 2019). Taking an ethnographic approach that studies women over a longer period of time

underlines the importance of the lifecycle in the study of domestic workers.⁴ The life story interviews shed light on the ways in which mobility and immobility are interconnected in the lives of migrant domestic workers.

The Decision to Leave

Zemzem was sixteen years old when she migrated to Qatar. As mentioned before, by law only women over the age of eighteen are allowed to migrate abroad in Ethiopia. In practice, however, younger women also obtain visas. Birth certificates are easy to come by and all the women we interviewed had changed their date of birth in order to get a visa. In the past decade, stories about the large-scale human rights violations against domestic workers have also reached Ethiopia, and many people are aware of the abuse and exploitation that women may encounter in the Middle East, including adolescent girls and young women who aspire to migrate. They hope that they will have luck (*edil*) and benefit from their migration instead of encountering difficult situations (see Fernandez 2019; Grabska et al. 2019). The dominant discourse about migration to the Middle East is that women and girls are trafficked; brokers would approach rural families and convince them to send their daughters to the Middle East (see Minaye 2012; Jones et al. 2014; Demissie 2017). Yet, this emphasis on trafficking and immobility could be interpreted as a form of epistemic violence in which the stories of migrant girls and women are rendered peripheral in public discourses, including many academic and non-academic studies in Ethiopia and beyond. While brokers do play an important role in the migration of adolescent girls and young women, their role should not be overestimated. The emphasis on the role of brokers who “lure women into migration” is a strong example of the divergence between the lived realities of migrants and the production of knowledge about migrants, and migrant girls and women in particular.⁵ According to the stories of the interviewees, they often took the decision themselves and arranged their migration themselves, sometimes with the help of intermediaries, relatives, or friends. In many cases, they only informed their parents after having finished the application procedures. Senait migrated to Saudi Arabia when she was seventeen and had added four

4 Over the past fifteen years, I have been following a number of Ethiopian domestic workers who worked in Yemen. Some of them returned home, where they took up jobs or married, while others moved on to other countries in the Middle East and one migrated to Canada (see de Regt 2010).

5 I would like to thank Shimelis B. Gulema for this very valuable point.

years to her birth certificate. It was only after the application process was finished that she first told her family that she was going to migrate to the Middle East. Bakelech also took the decision to migrate herself. Her family did not approve of it and even tried to prevent her from migrating. But she was convinced that she wanted to go: “I wanted to try out life in Arab countries and all my friends had left before me and I had no friends who remained here.” Many studies have indicated that peer pressure plays an important role in Ethiopian girls’ and women’s decisions to migrate (see de Regt 2010; Fernandez 2019), and some even speak of a “culture of migration” (Jones et al. 2014). As one migrant we interviewed, Meseret, explained:

I wanted to be independent. I am less interested in education. My dream was to open my own beauty salon and I realized that I could only achieve my mission by working abroad. . . . I decided to migrate myself, and no one accepted my decision, even my eldest sister, who had migrated herself, was opposed to it. My mother did not want me to have my own ID card and apply for a passport. She even informed government officials that I was underage and not allowed to migrate. But later they realized how much I wanted to go abroad, and they allowed me to leave. My parents were leading a normal life: I did not leave because they were poor.

Although decision-making processes are difficult to study, as decisions are never unilaterally taken but influenced by others, placing emphasis on trafficking leaves too little room for women’s agency. The trafficking discourse portrays female migrants as docile victims who migrated against their will, lacking control and being unaware of the work that they are going to do (de Regt 2010, 241). Without denying the fact that there are women who are lured into migration, the stories we collected show that women as well as adolescent girls often made the decision to migrate themselves. Adolescence is a particular stage in the course of one’s life; it is a period of critical transitions when major life decisions are made, albeit in context-specific ways (Bucholtz 2002; Del Franco 2012; Grabska et al. 2019). Yet, as Grabska (2016) highlights, while adolescence is a temporal, context-specific stage between childhood and adulthood, migration involves both a temporal and a spatial shift. This means that adolescents move from one geographic location to an other and simultaneously become older and move into adulthood. The decision to migrate is often closely related to transition into a particular type of adulthood. Migration can, however, also lead to changes in the development of one’s life course that would otherwise not have taken place. When young women assume the role of breadwinner for their families, for example, they have also constructed alternative forms of adulthood in doing so. I will return to this aspect in the last section, when I discuss the impact of migration on social status.

Stuck in the House? (Im)mobility at Work

Domestic workers worldwide suffer from many of the same problems because they are working inside the homes of their employers and are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. This applies in particular to migrant domestic workers because they are working in a foreign country and lack the protection of their relatives, often leaving them isolated. In the past three decades, academic research has shown that (migrant) domestic workers are not mere victims but also have agency (see, for example, Constable 1997; Adams and Dickey 2000; Anderson 2000; Lan 2006; Parreñas 2001; Fernandez and de Regt 2014; Fernandez 2020). These studies highlight the diversity of women's experiences depending, amongst other things, on their employers, their legal status, and their social network. However, as mentioned before, public discourses about migrant domestic workers are still dominated by stories of abuse and exploitation, indicating that unravelling how these discourses are produced, legitimized, and perpetuated is an urgent task. As mentioned above, the emphasis on the negative experiences of migrant girls and women can itself be interpreted as a form of systemic, epistemological violence, in which their lived realities and their agency are neglected.

This is also the case in Ethiopia, where the main elements of these stories are that migrant women have a very heavy workload with hardly any time off; are not allowed to leave the house of their employers; must hand over their passports to their employers and become undocumented in case they run away; face physical, verbal, and sexual abuse; and sometimes do not get enough to eat or lack a proper place to sleep. In addition, there have been numerous cases of women who returned to Ethiopia in body bags. Such events have often led to a temporary ban on migration to certain countries. In November 2013, for instance, in response to the large-scale violations of rights of migrant women the Ethiopian government banned all labor migration to the Middle East. Bans had been introduced previously for particular countries, but this ban concerned the entire Middle East and continued for five years. It was lifted in February 2018, when the Ethiopian government signed a number of bilateral agreements with Arab countries. As I have argued elsewhere (de Regt 2010), the Ethiopian state plays an ambivalent role with regard to women's migration. The government allows international migration and is proud of the so-called "freedom of movement"; yet, it is itself responsible for the fact that many people do not believe that their livelihoods at home will improve. In addition, while the government tries to control and regulate migration, it does not want to lose the remittances and therefore applies policies selectively.

Thus, while the migration of Ethiopian women to the Middle East suggests a degree of mobility, their living and working conditions are

characterized by extreme immobility. Their freedom of movement is highly controlled; they are often not allowed to leave the house of their employers, they cannot enter certain parts of the house, they sometimes have no right to have a mobile phone and are sometimes not allowed to meet other Ethiopians. Meseret migrated to Beirut, where her sister was living, but during the two years of her employment she never saw her sister: "They didn't want me to contact any Ethiopians. They shouted at me for nothing and locked me in the house for two years. I only saw the city and the outside world after two years." When she wanted to contact her sister, she had to write her parents in Ethiopia, who would then inform her sister. Rahel is twenty-three years old and lived in Beirut and Dubai. She returned from Dubai because she had continuous quarrels with her female employer, who wanted her to have sex with her intellectually disabled son. "Employers and their sons are very difficult, they always harassed me sexually. They would come to the kitchen and touch my body, and the madam even supported the harassment of her own son. In Dubai, I could hardly sleep: the sons of the family would always come to my room. One of the sons had the key to my room and I would often find him in my bedroom." Domestic workers' mobility is not only restricted; they also have to accept that other people invade the limited space they have for themselves.

Yet, migrant domestic workers circumvent and resist exclusionary and oppressive spatial arrangements inside and outside the house in various ways. Pande studied migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and argues that "migrant women are active users of these spaces, and strategically use and manipulate space to challenge disciplinary practices" (2014, 43). In Lebanon, live-in domestics use the balconies to forge friendships and build alliances with other domestic workers while live-out domestics build social networks via rental apartments and church courtyards. Unfortunately, the data that we collected does not provide insight in the various ways in which domestic workers resist these spatial arrangements. But based on other research we can assume that Ethiopian women used similar strategies. Fernandez (2014), for example, has demonstrated that Ethiopian domestic workers exercised agency inside the house through confrontations with their employers and outside the house through religious practices and by building up relationships with men.

Moving Back, Moving On, and Beyond

As mentioned in the introduction, most of the literature on Ethiopian domestic workers focuses on their living and working conditions during the period for which they are employed as domestics. As a result, the emphasis is

very much on their immobility. Yet, in an earlier article I have argued that it is important to look at the migration trajectories of migrant domestic workers. These trajectories show that women are much more mobile than is often assumed (de Regt 2010). I discussed the different trajectories of women who migrated to Yemen and the different forms their mobility took while working in Yemen, such as the move from live-in to live-out, from working for local families to working for expatriate families, from working as domestics to other jobs, and from being documented to being undocumented workers. Women may run away from situations of oppression, change employers, return home, or move to another country.

As Liebelt mentions in her study on Filipina domestic workers in Israel (2008, 568), there is a clear hierarchy of destination countries for migrants. Some destination countries are desired more than others. This hierarchy is based on differences with regard to “salaries and the legal entitlements migrants can claim, the costs and risks migrants have to take in order to enter, and these countries’ overall subjective and imaginative attractiveness” (Liebelt 2008, 568). Drawing on Werbner (1999), Liebelt maintains that migrant domestic workers could be considered “working class cosmopolitans”: such individuals share information about employment and living conditions in different countries and often “*move on and on* rather than back and forth” (Liebelt 2008, 568). Our interviews also show how mobile migrant domestic workers are; even women who had only been abroad for a few years moved from one country to another. Senait, for example, migrated to Saudi Arabia via a legal agent and worked in Mecca for six months. She ran away and travelled to Riyadh, where she worked for six different employers as a freelancer.⁶ She was undocumented and lived by herself. In November 2013, she was deported to Ethiopia.

While Senait moved within Saudi Arabia, other girls migrated from one country to another. Desta first worked in Beirut, then in Kuwait, and then in Beirut again. She decided to go to Kuwait because she had heard that salaries were higher there. She stayed for only seven months because she fell ill and returned to Ethiopia. When she had recovered, she went back to Beirut and worked there for another three years. Betty is twenty-eight years old and

6 In the literature on domestic workers in the Middle East, a division is made between contract workers and runaways or freelancers (see Jureidini and Moukarbel 2004). Contract workers are employed on a legal contract and are therefore documented. Runaways and freelancers have left their employers, and thus their sponsors, and are automatically undocumented. In reality, the boundaries between these two categories are very fluid. Contract workers can, for example, also be undocumented when their contracts have been organized through illegal agencies who have neglected to arrange their documents (see de Regt 2010).

migrated when she was seventeen. She worked in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Qatar, and Bahrain. She said:

Dubai was my first destination. I was cleaning eighteen separate rooms, six bathrooms, I did the laundry and prepared food for the whole family. I was doing all these tasks alone. After finishing my contract, they decided to send me back without any reason. When I was in Dubai Airport I ran away to Abu Dhabi and I worked there with a runaway status⁷ for one year. The police caught and arrested me while I was working, and they deported me to Ethiopia. After deportation, my plan was to migrate again. I decided to migrate to Qatar. I paid seven thousand Birr to a local broker. In Qatar, the madam didn't want to allow me to use the bathroom, but I always kept myself clean. When I would clean myself, the madam would get upset as she considered it the behavior of a prostitute. But the rest of the family was nice to me.

Back in Ethiopia, Betty decided to migrate to Bahrain but her employers did not offer her sufficient food and she decided to return home again. After a while she migrated to Sharjah, but again received too little to eat and ran away to Abu Dhabi. In Abu Dhabi, she was arrested because she was undocumented and returned home with the help of her brother.

The fact that women move from place to place, return home, and sometimes migrate again shows their agency. Running away is one of the few possibilities to leave a situation of abuse and exploitation and can be considered an act of resistance. Employers do not only lose their domestic worker, but also the money they have paid to the employment agency. The sponsorship system (*kafala*)⁸ is in place to tie migrants to their employers and prevent them from running away, yet the numerous stories of runaways show that the system is not effective. Women who return home decide to migrate again because they have limited opportunities for building a life in Ethiopia. As I will discuss in the last section of the chapter, once they have returned to Ethiopia those women who worked in the Middle East have a low social status, their chances of getting married are limited, and, most of all, very few job opportunities are available to them. Meseret explained: "When I was in Beirut, I wanted to return home, and when I returned, I wanted to go back." Yet, returning home is not always a voluntary decision. Fifteen of the interviewed women were deported from Saudi Arabia between November

7 See footnote 3.

8 In the Middle East, the prevalent system of sponsorship known as *kafala* requires the residence of migrant workers (including migrant domestic workers) to be sponsored by a *kafil* (sponsor) who must be a citizen. The legal residence of a migrant worker is tied to the *kafil*, who is in most cases his or her employer (Fernandez and de Regt 2014, 9).

2013 and April 2014, and several other women were deported from other countries because they were undocumented. What did deportation mean to them and how did it affect their mobility and social status?

Forced to Return: Gender and Deportation

Deportation has become an important topic in the study of migration (see for example De Genova 2002; Peutz 2006; De Genova and Peutz 2010; Coutin 2014; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2014). Most studies on deportation focus on men because men are deported far more often than women. One of the reasons for this imbalance is that women are considered less of a threat. Undocumented women often work as domestic workers and are seen as innocent labor migrants trying to make a living in a decent way. Undocumented men, however, are automatically stigmatized as threats to the state, involved in criminal activities and taking jobs away from the local population (see Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013; Das Gupta 2014).

Deportation is a very common practice in most countries in the Middle East, and in particular in the oil-rich countries on the Arabian Peninsula. The *kafala* system of sponsorship binds migrant workers' residence permits to "sponsoring" employers, whose written consent is required for workers to change employers or leave the country. Migrants cannot change their sponsor or jobs unless a release from the sponsor is issued; a new sponsorship from a new employer and an approval from the concerned authorities must then also be issued. Those who do so without permission are considered undocumented or illegal and liable for imprisonment and deportation. The *kafala* system, however, directly results in widespread migration irregularities and deportation.

Deportation was a recurring theme in the interviews we conducted with returned female migrant. We intentionally interviewed fifteen women who had been deported from Saudi Arabia in the period November 2013 to April 2014, when 163,000 Ethiopian migrants were forcibly deported (see de Regt and Tafesse 2015; Lecadet and Melkamu 2016). In April 2013, the Saudi government announced a seven-month period in which undocumented migrants could regularize their residence and employment status or leave the country without having to pay a penalty for the time they had been undocumented.⁹ Between April and November 2013, 4.7 million undocumented

9 Saudi Arabia's large-scale campaign to regularize the migrant population was an indirect result of the "Arab Spring" and underlines the global dimension of a seemingly regional migration issue. The popular protests in Tunisia and Egypt were mainly about high unemployment rates and widespread

migrants were regularized, and one million migrants left the country (De Bel-Air 2014, 10). Once the amnesty period was over, the Saudi Ministry of Labor carried out raids on labor sites and the police arrested undocumented migrants in their homes and on the street. The crackdown was accompanied by severe human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention, theft of migrants' belongings, rape, beatings, and killings (see IOM 2013; HRW 2013; Lecadet and Melkamu 2016). In November 2013, the Ethiopian government decided to repatriate all undocumented migrants from Saudi Arabia, facilitated by international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration, UNICEF, and the Red Cross. Within a period of four months more than 160,000 migrants returned home, many traumatized by the experiences of their arrest and deportation. While men were on average more often undocumented than women, the large numbers of women present in Saudi Arabia resulted in a higher number of female deportees.

The women we interviewed described their horrible experiences of arrest and imprisonment. Feven ran away from her employers and was arrested when she was out in the street: "It was so bad, the police caught me when I went to a shop to buy oil. They put me in a car and took me to a prison. In the prison I saw many Ethiopians, some of them were dying. The Saudi police put drugs in our bread to make us sleep, because many people were having mental problems." Senait was arrested in her own house, and some of her friends were raped. She was imprisoned for a month and finally returned to Ethiopia. When asked how she felt about being back home, she replied: "I am in my country." Zemzem, whose story was introduced at the start of this chapter, was living in a house with eight other Ethiopian girls when the Saudi police entered, arrested them, and subsequently imprisoned them for three weeks. She told us in detail about her experiences. She hardly had clothes to wear, covered herself with a shawl, and had to sleep outside. The Saudi guards and policemen were sleeping next to them and the risk of being sexually abused was always there. She was continuously on the alert and scared every night. She considered herself very lucky because she was not sexually abused or physically harmed and returned "with her hands and her legs." But Zemzem is very unhappy that she returned empty-handed, not having been able to realize her ambitions. Her family, however, preferred to have her back in one piece; they said that they were not interested in her money.

corruption practices. Afraid of similar protests, the Saudi government proactively addressed these issues. The two main reforms implemented were the "Saudiization" of the workforce and a multi-dimensional campaign against undocumented migrants (De Bel-Air 2014, 4.)

But the response Zemzem received from her family upon her return was by no means the rule. Helen's family, for example, was not happy that she returned home. They had spent all the money that she had sent back with the intention of starting a business and were in need of her remittances. The community also looked down on her: "The community treats me oddly. They don't treat me like a person who returned willingly. Since we returned by force their reception was different, they have a bad image of deportation." Birtukan confirmed this view: "Neighbors consider me a failure." She returned empty-handed, is unemployed, and now depends on the same family members that she had migrated for in the first place. "Deportees," Birtukan stated, "are considered illegal and unsuccessful."

The social ramifications of deportation have not yet been studied extensively.¹⁰ In their article about Nigerian women deported from Europe, Ratia and Notermans (2012) unravel the relationship between gender, kinship, and deportation. Similar to Ethiopian women who migrate as domestic workers, Nigerian women migrate to improve their own lives and those of their families. While their lives abroad are characterized by hardship and immobility, because of the work they do (sex work, in the case of Nigerian women) and/or because they are undocumented, they prefer to stay in the countries of migration as it gives them the possibility to become socially mobile. Deportation turns their mobility in "an unwanted direction, which frustrates women's project of social mobility." (Ratia and Notermans 2012, 155). According to Ratia and Notermans, social mobility is more important for women than geographical mobility; deportation is a very dramatic experience for Nigerian women (2012, 155). What, therefore, is the social status of Ethiopian women who have—whether forcibly or voluntarily—returned home?

Socially Mobile? Migration and Social Status

Migration can lead to upward and downward social mobility. For those who stay behind, migrants often have a high social status because they are perceived to earn money, which can improve their socioeconomic status as well as that of their families. In the countries of migration, migrants often experience downward mobility because they are forced to do jobs that they would not do at home, such as unskilled and degrading work. Most Ethiopian

10 Research by Drotbohm (2011; 2014) and Ratia and Notermans (2012) are important exceptions to this statement.

women who migrate to the Middle East would, for example, not have taken up paid domestic labor in Ethiopia as it is considered low-status work.¹¹

In Ethiopia, the social status of migrant women working in the Middle East is ambivalent. On the one hand, social mobility is one of the main aims of migration: migration to the Middle East represents a way to improve one's own life and that of one's family. On the other hand, the social status of female migrants is low. The numerous stories about abuse and exploitation have led to a public discourse in which female migrants are seen negatively. The dominant view is that Ethiopian women in the Middle East have been sexually active, voluntarily or against their will. In Ethiopia, sexuality is surrounded by restrictive norms and values. Women's sexuality is controlled to a large extent and premarital sex for women is often socially sanctioned. Women who migrate are considered to be out of the control of the family—in particular of the male members of the family—and therefore prone to sexual activities or sexual abuse. One of the prevailing ideas is that domestic work in the Middle East is not profitable enough and that only women who are involved in sex work can benefit from their migration.¹² As a result, women who return home with money, good clothes, and jewelry are considered prostitutes.

This negative perspective on migrant women affects their social status when they return to Ethiopia. In our interviews the women did not refer to their social status explicitly, except the few women who mentioned that the community looked down on them because they were considered failures. The link with sexuality was also not mentioned, but this is not surprising as women will most probably not mention that themselves. In addition, talking about sex and sexuality is a taboo in Ethiopia, especially among women. The interviewees did speak about their marriage prospects. Most women said that they would like to get married but that it is difficult to find suitable husbands; men are not interested in marrying them. Their peers who stayed behind have married and are having children. A number of girls broke up with their boyfriends in order to migrate. In informal conversations with Ethiopian men, I often heard that only migrant women who returned with a lot of money and women who were beautiful were able to get married after their return. Ethiopian women said that men only marry returned women for their money, and that they may divorce them quickly.

11 Domestic labor is a form of intimate labor that brings the worker into the private sphere of the employer and therefore goes hand in hand with a range of hierarchies and inequalities.

12 Ratia and Notermans (2012, 157) mention that public discourse in Nigeria also assumes that women can only benefit from emigration when they are involved in sex work.

Rosa said: "I don't have a boyfriend at the moment, but I want to get married. Migration has affected my marriage prospects; it consumed my age. Girls of my age should get married, but I am not. On the other hand, migration helped me to fulfill my needs. Due to migration my life changed economically, and I got freedom and education." Fiker, who was deported, also thinks that migration has affected her marriage prospects: "The main change after my return is that I started a relationship and have a job. I became more confident and have a salary. Thanks to the migration, I have changed economically, and got more self-esteem."

Economic independence is valued highly but marriage is also important for a woman's social status in Ethiopian society. As noted above, the decision to migrate is often closely related to the desire to enter a particular type of adulthood. Yet, migration can also lead to stagnation and delay in the way in which one's life plays out over time. This is the case in Ethiopia, where migrant women have difficulty getting married and therefore do not achieve full adulthood. The emphasis women put on economic independence could mean that social mobility is increasingly defined in terms of economic achievements and with less regard for marital status.

Conclusion

As the above exploration of the experiences of Ethiopian domestic workers shows, gender and age are important analytical lenses in the study of mobility and immobility. Young and unmarried women migrate to the Middle East because they feel the need to provide for their families, because they want to escape oppressive gender regimes at home and/or aspire to more exciting lives. For young women, migration represents an important transition to another phase of life; they leave their parental house and become economically independent. Many become providers for their families and in doing so may increase their social mobility as well as that of their families. Yet, migration may also mean that their lives become stuck and that they are unable to achieve full adulthood; their role as providers and their social status as migrant women affect their marriage chances. Mobility and sexuality are important factors impacting their social status; young and unmarried women are not supposed to be mobile, as mobility increases the chances that they become sexually active, whether voluntarily or against their will.

The demand for paid domestic labor in the Middle East is gendered as well. Most families prefer female domestics, which is related to practices of gender segregation (the strong separation of male and female domains). The private sphere of the house is, however, not a safe space for migrant women;

they are subjected to various forms of disciplinary practices and forms of control and run the risk of being (sexually) abused and exploited. Yet, women resist in various ways, and may decide situations of oppression by running away. While the mobility of contract workers inside the country of migration is much more restricted, as they are often not allowed to leave the house of their employers, the transnational mobility of freelancers is limited because many of them are undocumented and cannot leave the country of migration because of strict exit policies. Deportation practices are also gendered; while in general male migrants are deported more often, in Saudi Arabia's large-scale deportation campaign of 2013–14 more women were deported. Their experiences are gendered as well, among other things because rape was a common practice among Saudi policemen. Returning home as an unmarried migrant woman, forcibly or voluntarily, has a great impact on women's social status. Their sexual purity is questioned and, more importantly, they can no longer enhance their social mobility or that of their families. As a result, many young and unmarried women decide to migrate again.

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Chapter 5

Ethiopian Diasporans in South Africa

Dynamics of Migration, Opportunities, and Challenges

Mulugeta F. Dinbabo

Background/Contextualization

Given the huge movement of people and growing interconnectedness in a globalized world, discourses around migration increasingly turn to the study of diasporas (e.g., Dinbabo 2022; Dinbabo and Badewa 2020; Dinbabo and Nyasulu 2015). The past few decades have witnessed growth in the quantities, variety, and activity of diasporas, as well as in diasporans' investment in both their countries of origin and their host countries (IOM 2013). According to the IOM (2020, 2), as of 2020 the number of global migrants had reached an estimated figure of 272 million, representing about 3.5% of the global population. In addition, the global number of refugees and asylum seekers rose by about 13 million between 2010 and 2017, accounting for nearly a quarter of the growth in the number of all foreign migrants (IOM 2020, 2).

A number of scholars argue that diasporans are significant actors not only in national, bilateral, and global matters but also in questions of migration and development relating to their countries of origin (Brubaker 2005; Demir 2015; Harald 2008; Peck 2006; Safran 1991). Indeed, a not inconsiderable amount of attention has been given to the roles that diasporas play in connecting community members and contributing to civil society organizations, self-help groups, development associations, government agencies, and the

private sector (Belebema and Mensah 2017; Dinbabo and Carciotto 2015; Harald 2008; IOM 2013; Sithole, Tevera, and Dinbabo 2022). Diasporas play an essential part in social and economic development in both countries of origin and host countries (Peck 2006). Diasporas enable societies that are vibrant, ground-breaking, and open to international trade, investment, talent, and knowledge to develop these traits further (Harald 2008). Some diasporic communities participate in political activities that fuel animosities between communities and ethnic groups, in some cases funding insurgencies that cause havoc and destruction. Moreover, a number of diasporas have made it possible for nationalism, hostilities, and polarization to extend across nations and regions (Adamson 2005; Lyons 2007). Ethiopian diaspora groups in USA, Europe, Australia, and Canada, for example, have recently become engaged in nationalist movements within Ethiopia itself, spreading propaganda and fundraising on behalf of the Ethiopian political parties.

This chapter studies Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa, asking how they have developed and what roles—if any—they play in matters in Ethiopia. South Africa has only recently become a destination for immigrants from Ethiopia, with the first arriving in small numbers during the early 1990s, primarily as asylum seekers and refugees. Migration from Ethiopia to South Africa swelled between 2008 and 2015, and in recent years, the population has grown substantially. Today, thousands of Ethiopians live in South Africa, where the majority of Ethiopian immigrants are young and involved in a diverse range of business ventures. Highly skilled Ethiopian diasporans contribute to South Africa's socioeconomic development, with more than half of them residing in six provincial capitals: Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Mussina. In general, the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa comprises of individuals who were either born in Ethiopia or are second-generation Ethiopians born in South Africa.

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2020), the eight metropolitan areas with the largest Ethiopian communities in South Africa are Johannesburg, City of Cape Town, Buffalo City (East London), Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (East Rand), City of eThekweni (Durban), City of Tshwane (Pretoria), Mangaung Municipality (Bloemfontein), and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality (Port Elizabeth). Their income levels and social status vary widely, and most Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa do not hold South African citizenship. Many Ethiopians living in the major cities of South Africa are members of the lower and middle economic classes; few are well-educated and fewer still live in affluent suburbs.

Some Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa have been successful in business ventures such as small-scale grocery retail, clothing, restaurants, car washes, and running car parks. Yet little research to date has attempted to explain what has contributed to the relative high success of Ethiopian

entrepreneurs in South Africa. One observable hypothesis is that high levels of social capital, such as networks of trust and reciprocity, enable Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa to succeed in business activities. The professional association, Ethiopian Professionals in Southern Africa (EthPASA), for instance, builds connections between highly skilled Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa. Previous research suggests that Ethiopian immigrant entrepreneurs have made essential contributions to their own success by undertaking small-scale trading that reaches out to the poorest sections of society in urban and peri-urban areas; but a comprehensive analysis has yet to be performed. This chapter seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the opportunities, challenges, and entrepreneurial achievements of Ethiopian diasporans living in South Africa. The subsequent sections provide a literature review, discussion of conceptual frameworks, methodology, and results and discussion, before drawing conclusions and providing some recommendations for future research.

Literature Review and Conceptualization

There is a sizeable body of literature on the concept of diaspora (e.g., Brah 1996; Brubaker 2005; Demir 2015; Gilroy 1993; Majee et al. 2019; Nzabamwita and Dinbabo, 2022; Safran 1991; Sithole and Dinbabo 2016; Soysal 2000; Tölölyan 1996; Vertovec 2005; Werbner 2002). The term, which comes from the Greek word *diaspeirō*, meaning “to scatter” or “to spread about,” dates back to the classical period, when it was used to refer to Jewish populations (Tölölyan 1996; Werbner 2002). The founding of the Jewish diaspora dates to 722 BCE, when the Assyrians conquered and destroyed the Kingdom of Israel under King Sargon II (Atzmon et al. 2010; Bowman 2004; Goldwurm 1982). In 597 BCE and again in 586 BCE, Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar II expelled many Jewish people from the Kingdom of Judah but permitted them to stay with the Jewish community in Babylon (Atzmon et al. 2010; Goldwurm 1982), although some of the Judean Jews chose to flee to Egypt’s Nile Delta (Atzmon et al. 2010; Goldwurm 1982; Gorny 2012).

In the past few centuries, the term diaspora has increased to refer to migrant populations in general, whether Armenians, Chinese, Greeks, Jewish, Kurds, Tamils, Italians, Indians, Mexicans, or more still (Atzmon et al. 2010; Bowman 2004; Goldwurm 1982; Gorny 2012; Harald 2008; Peck 2006). In current usage, the term “diaspora” indicates a group of people scattered from their place of origin and who keep a memory, a dream, or a legend of their original homeland (Safran 1991). Diasporas fall into two categories: forced and voluntary (Atzmon et al. 2010; Bowman 2004; Goldwurm 1982). Forced diaspora frequently emerges from traumatic

events such as conflicts, suppression, or natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, or famine. Diasporans who have been forced to flee their homeland therefore tend to share a sense of abuse, misfortune, persecution, and loss as well as a craving to return to their country of origin. A voluntary diaspora, by comparison, is a group of people who have left their homeland in search of employment opportunities (Sithole and Dinbabo 2016). The largest and oldest diasporas in the world were created as the result of patterns of enslavement. Since the fifteenth century, slaves were taken from different parts of Africa to other parts of the world, leading, for example, to the Black/African Atlantic, trans-Saharan, and Indian Ocean diasporas (Arthur 2008).

According to a United Nations report (UN 2019), transnationalism and globalization in recent decades has led to accelerated migration and the creation of diaspora communities across the globe. The same report records that the United States hosts the greatest number of immigrants in the world, at 51 million. Germany and Saudi Arabia host about 13 million people each. Europe is considered the largest receiver of international migrants (82 million), followed by Northern America (59 million) and Western Asia and Northern Africa (49 million) (IOM 2020 19–27). The International Organization for Migration (IOM 2020) reports that India has the largest diaspora community globally with an estimated 17.5 million living outside the nation. After India, Mexico (11.8 million) and China (10.7 million) have the second and third largest diaspora populations in the world, respectively (IOM 2020, 19–27). The report also indicates that one third of all international migrants are from the top ten countries of origin.

The African Union (AU) reports that there are about 112.6 million people in the African diaspora in South America (primarily Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela); 39.2 million in North America (United States, Mexico, and Canada); and 13.5 million in the Caribbean (Lituchy 2019, 1). The AU diaspora unit is the focal point for inspiring African diasporans to take part in building their continent (AU 2015). The diaspora unit's role is therefore to serve as a catalyst for rebuilding the African continent by involving all African diasporans (AU 2019). Accordingly, the AU has put together a number of regional and country-level policy frameworks for the purpose of managing and coordinating African diasporans at the global level. This includes advocacy, networking, providing various forms of technical support, and establishing frameworks for participation, collaboration, and working relations (AU 2015; 2019). In this vein, the Nigerian government has established its own Diaspora Commission, tasked with providing a platform for and ensuring the active involvement and participation of Nigerian diasporans in policies, programs, and projects (Arhin-Sam 2019). The Cape Verde government has also initiated a special project, the Dias De Cabo Verde, to support

its diaspora, and the Cape Verdean Institute of Communities has been working closely with the IOM as the main implementing partner (Resende-Santos 2015). The Kenyan government is also bringing diaspora policies into the mainstream national development agenda following its visions, goals, and objectives for 2030 (Government of Kenya 2014). This policy framework acknowledges both the role of the diaspora as a critical component in economic development and the realization of the overall vision of a globally competitive and prosperous Kenya by 2030 (Government of Kenya 2014). Recognizing the role of the Rwandan diaspora in the national development and inclusion policy, a new policy measure was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation (MINAFFET) in 2009. The Ugandan government has also formed a Department of Diaspora Services (DSD) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve diaspora issues and promote their contribution to Uganda's social, cultural, technical, and political growth.

Ethiopian Government Diaspora Policy

The Ethiopian Diaspora Agency (EDA) was officially established in 2019 in Addis Ababa. Ethiopia's national diaspora policy aims at giving its diaspora scope for greater involvement in finance, trade, construction, health, education, and tourism. To this end, foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin were issued with identity cards so that they can participate in the local economy as domestic investors (EDA 2019a). In the housing sector, for example, lucrative incentives are presented, and investment is allowed by either 100 percent ownership of equity or joint ventures. Furthermore, the EDA is designing projects to be implemented back in Ethiopia, channeling the outcomes of migration and diaspora into local growth (EDA 2019b). The agency's flagship program, Diaspora to Development, provides a range of options and opportunities for qualified expatriates to re-engage in Ethiopia with development initiatives. Ethiopia's federal, national, and local governments incorporate diaspora issues into their development agendas (EDA 2019a). The EDA has four major directorates: the Diaspora Community Development Directorate; the Diaspora Participation Directorate; the Information, Research, and Communication Affairs Directorate; the and Rights and Legal Protection Affairs Directorate (EDA 2019b).

The EDA seeks to expand the number of diasporans who contribute their expertise, make financial contributions, and invest in Ethiopian companies in collaboration with the private sector (Chacko and Gebre 2013). The Ethiopian Investment Authority has also implemented the newly enacted investment law, providing returning migrants opportunities such

as tax exemptions and other social and economic assistance in an attempt to encourage them to come back and invest in their home country (EDA 2019b). The Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) and other private banks have taken notice of the importance of diasporans' investments and thus rely on a legal framework to reduce the costs of remittances. In this regard, the Ethiopian Embassy in South Africa has instigated Diaspora Investor Forums with the explicit aim of supporting development efforts (EDA 2019b). In general, the Ethiopian government promotes and provides information on investment opportunities and prospects for economic growth in Ethiopia. This is also achieved through a web portal, which helps diaspora leaders to invest and to encourage others to do so. In the light of the Ethiopian state's efforts to engage its diasporans in participating in domestic affairs and investing in Ethiopia's growth, it is worth asking how these efforts play out on the ground for diasporans, that is, what opportunities and challenges stand before Ethiopian diasporans. Before looking at these in any detail, in the following section I shall outline how I shall go about studying these opportunities and challenges in the context of the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa.

Methodology of the Study

Studying the opportunities and challenges faced by South Africa's Ethiopian diaspora requires a combination of secondary data analysis and empirical field data gathering. As Papadopoulos and Stephenson (2006) argue, analyzing research participants' experiences is crucial in the context of social science studies. Likewise, Wagstaff et al. (2014) foreground the importance of practical experience and analysis of the respondents in contemporary social science research. I therefore selected sixty-five respondents from nine provinces in South Africa, whom I contacted and interviewed.¹ The respondents included members of the Ethiopian diaspora community,² refugees and asylum-seekers, and community structures, scholars, and organizations active in diaspora studies. I also conducted meetings and teleconferences at different levels in South Africa, allowing me to understand the participants' different views, ideas, knowledge, and perceptions about Ethiopian diasporans in

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- 1 The nine provinces are Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Northwest, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga.
 - 2 These members were resident in Bethlehem, Bloemfontein, Cape Town, East London, Grahamstown, Kimberley, King William's Town, Musina, Nelspruit, Paarl, Pietermaritzburg, Polokwane, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria, Durban, Rustenburg, Welkom, Johannesburg, and Worcester.

South Africa. The field data were collected between January and February 2020. In general, data collection included focus group meetings, semi-structured and key participant interviews, observations, survey questionnaires and secondary data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Opportunities and challenges are central to examining the experiences of Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa and assessing the dynamics of migration. This section presents respondents' opinions regarding the opportunities and challenges of the diaspora community in South Africa. The responses are grouped according to specific themes that emerged from the analysis of the field data.

Opportunities

Social capital

Scholars in the field (Coleman 1988; Krishna 2002; Putnam 2000; Vilakazi and Dinbabo 2014; Woolcock 1998; Woolcock and Narayan 2000) use the term social capital to refer to a propensity for mutually beneficial collective action that is derived from the quality of social relationships existing in a particular society. In this regard, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) note that social capital signifies the nature of social interactions exhibited by a society's members in their daily lives. Vilakazi and Dinbabo (2014) argue that social capital refers, for example, to the benefits of social organizations, structures, standards, and trust that promote action and participation for a common good. They further note that, for most human affiliations, face-to-face relations create systems, trust, and standards of reciprocity.

To understand and analyze the diasporans' networks and connections within communities, respondents were asked to provide some information about their perspectives, encounters, and impression of their systems and connections of trust. Based upon the information obtained from several respondents, it would appear that diasporans establish their networks and transnational societies at the familial, social, industrial, and commercial levels. Ethiopian diaspora communities in different parts of South Africa have been well organized with a high degree of trust within the diaspora as a whole. However, some of the respondents indicated there is some mistrust between the different ethnic-based development associations. According to these respondents, this mistrust originates from Ethiopian federalism, in

which states are structured along ethnic lines. For Ethiopians, family ties are solid and, in many cases, establish the basis for trust along different types of cross-fringe collaboration. Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa entered informal business and established solid client relations particularly in the townships³ and open market areas.

Churches and mosques play an important leadership role in the Ethiopian community. Various respondents commented that Ethiopian business partnerships have been strong and geographically diversified, and thoroughly connected through churches, mosques, and community-based organizations and self-help groups such as *Iquibs*⁴ and *Iddirs*.⁵ Members of *Iddirs* obtain incentives, such as the right to obtain financial assistance when family members die. *Iquibs* promote saving behaviors and the donation of credit to its members, while the church offers spiritual happiness. These strong community-based structures facilitate trustworthiness and have serve Ethiopians in their day-to-day interactions with peers, customers, suppliers, and colleagues to successfully conduct business. The following comments reflect some perspectives in this regard:

Our success and existence in South Africa is directly linked with our connections with community members, church, social institutions based on trust, mutual benefit, and networking.

As a member of *Iquib* I'm expected to attend meetings, when I'm invited by the chairperson . . . attendance at *Iddirs* for mourning is obligatory for the members of the Ethiopian community . . . dishonour to meet such commitments could result in warnings and dismissal and exclusion from the association.

Iquib is the best way for setting aside money that you don't need now and there is little risk involved. *Iquib* schemes provide the opportunity to save money for growth and development. For example, you can buy a shop with your money that could increase in value. When you need your money

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- 3 In South Africa, the terms "township" and "location" usually refer to underdeveloped, racially segregated urban areas that are usually built on the periphery of towns and cities.
 - 4 A traditional means of saving that exists completely outside the formal financial system. It is a form of revolving savings, whereby people voluntarily join a group and make a mandatory contributions (every week, pay period, or month, for example).
 - 5 An association made up of a group of people united by ties of family and friendship, by living in the same district, by jobs, or by belonging to the same ethnic group, and has an objective of providing mutual aid and financial assistance.

back, you sell your shop, hoping someone else will pay you more for it. For instance, you can send money back home and buy a piece of land thinking it will increase in value as more businesses move into your own country or town. You expect to sell the land in two, three, or five years when someone will buy it from you for a lot more money than you paid.

The entrepreneurial mindset of Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa guides them through hardships, helps them to start a business from scratch, and rapidly builds successful small-scale businesses. Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa succeed because they use the existing opportunities of social capital found in networks and trust (Putnam 2000). Overall, the entrepreneurial experiences of Ethiopian diasporas in South Africa have finely shaped business success stories of family enterprises.

Intellectual capital (highly skilled professionals)

Intellectual capital relates to educational background, information, expertise, work capability, and psychometric assessments (Namasivayam and Denizci 2006). At present, the roles and contributions of highly skilled Ethiopian diasporas in social and economic development are increasingly receiving scholarly attention. The existence of highly skilled intellectual/human capital in South Africa plays an important role in improving livelihoods, raising disposable incomes, expanding information and skills sets, growing the economy, and reducing poverty.

A large number of highly skilled Ethiopian professionals living in different parts of South Africa contribute significantly to the higher education system in general, in particular, to the development of science and technology. The respondents of this study agreed that there were three fundamental factors that explain the importance of highly skilled professionals in South Africa. Firstly, such professionals advance excellence in learning, teaching, and critical research while also playing a constructive role in strengthening tertiary institutions and educational sectors in Ethiopia. Secondly, they can identify and develop specific niche areas for research mainly in the social and natural sciences. Thirdly, they contribute towards the strengthening of partnerships to leverage research opportunities and funding. As many as 78 percent of the respondents agreed that intellectual/human capital contributes towards enhancing and strengthening partnerships, collaboration, and engagement to build and foster healthy relationships with various external parties. In particular, they develop stakeholder engagement, facilitating a thoughtful and coordinated approach to managing success. In this regard, most of the respondents indicated that highly skilled diasporans provide contextually relevant and excellent scholarship. They also facilitate learning and teaching by conducting a critical review of programs for articulation and seek to establish

a responsive environment which facilitates flexible learning and optimizes the use of technology.

Most of the highly skilled Ethiopians in South Africa have a strong professional footprint in Southern Africa and internationally. They are passionate academics with diverse expertise and are well connected internationally. They have the capacity to be responsive to the needs of the Ethiopian government and can initiate joint partnerships with Ethiopian universities, especially in the remit of PhD programs. They undertake research and innovation through the identification of topics and themes for research and development that can be explored in partnerships with internal and external parties to leverage research opportunities and funding. The foregoing assists in raising the profile of research and researchers, as leading scholars, PhD mentors, adjunct and other professors giving presentations at inaugural lectures and public events. Respondents acknowledged that highly skilled Ethiopian diasporans have obligations to fulfil. These include: supporting effective learning and teaching programs by identifying supervision needs in Ethiopian universities; facilitating the professionalization of teaching through formal and informal education for academics; identifying extraordinary/emeritus professors; facilitating internal capacitation through thesis and course presentations; developing a professional database; and partnering with selected partners and government for co-funding opportunities. Furthermore, they undertake partnerships, collaboration, and engagements with appropriate local and global professional organizations and institutions.

About 87 percent of respondents believed that highly skilled diasporas both encourage and stimulate Ethiopian culture and identity, thus furthering the growth of so-called “Ethiopianism” at home and abroad.⁶ These respondents added that professionals can set up an inclusive forum that brings together those with a common interest in Ethiopianism, establish a flagship organization for Ethiopians in South Africa by focusing on and celebrating Ethiopian unity, and build a public forum that honors and promotes the richness of Ethiopian cultural heritage. Among the range of views expressed by respondents were the following:

Highly skilled Ethiopian diasporans contribute to the country of destinations by supporting productivity of education, training, and healthcare. The contribution of skilled migrants to the development of Ethiopia goes far beyond their financial remittances, including transfers of skills and knowledge, network building, and bridging cultural divides.

6 “Ethiopianism is a new Ethiopiwinet where we all come together by valuing a dialogue culture to solve any problem and never at all using arguments or battles that bring war and killing to any Ethiopian anywhere at all” (Muchie 2018).

Many skilled Ethiopian diasporans reside in South Africa, yet most of them often maintain strong links to their origin. They play as a catalyst's role for many philanthropy, investments, and innovation in Ethiopia. Besides, they bring strong social networks and shared cultural values between the two African communities.

In South Africa, skilled Ethiopian diasporans in many situations tend to fill labour market gaps and thus to be complementary to the local labor force, allowing the economy of South Africa to grow more rapidly, which in turn creates more skilled labor forces, demanding more services, providing more taxes and leading to higher incomes and wages.

All of these responses show that intellectual capital of diasporans presents a number of opportunities for the development of both South Africa and Ethiopia. It is, therefore, one of the critical components of the diasporans' contribution. However, the Ethiopian government appears not to have fully utilized all the opportunities provided for them by intellectuals.

Reciprocity of resources (remittances)

Gouldner defines reciprocity as a "social rule that maintains, among other things, that people should return favours and other acts of kindness" (1959 70). This relates to the expectations, or trust, that one has to return a favor expected by another social actor who formerly provided an act of goodwill, compassion, or generosity (Falk and Fischbacher 2001). Each year, billions of dollars are sent by diaspora communities to their home countries. In 2019, for example, remittances amounting to \$529 billion were sent to low- and middle-income countries (World Bank 2019).

In the Ethiopian diaspora community, reciprocity is one of the acts of kindness used to support family members, friends, and community. About 96 percent of respondents confirmed that the reciprocity of remittances bestows huge benefits. Reciprocity assists individuals in obtaining lodging, medical care, and social consideration. Remittances account for a high percentage of Ethiopia's GDP. Respondents also indicated that remittances helped in terms of increasing the living standard for individual households or for a particular person that receives them. In general, remittances help diaspora family members or friends by supporting their day-to-day expenses. Remittances also increase the consumption by the diasporans' families in Ethiopia, act as a safety net by lifting families out of poverty, and increase school attendance amongst family members. Moreover, diasporans' family members can secure food, clothing, and health care as a result of remittances. Unlike other forms of support, remittances contribute to the decrease of poverty at the individual family level.

One of the respondents indicated that:

Most of the Ethiopian diaspora community members make financial contributions (remittances) to their family members during the major Ethiopian holidays such as Ethiopian Christmas (Gena), Timket (Epiphany), Ethiopian Easter (Fasika), Ethiopian New Year (Enkutatash), Finding of the True Cross (Meskel) . . . Mawlid al-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), and Eid-al Adha (Arafat).

He also indicated that:

When the family gets into trouble, such as death, illness, wedding, or any related social activities, Ethiopians have a strong culture of sending money back home.

Another respondent stated:

Within my family, the amount of money which I regularly send is a considerable source of income for my family, that enhances their livelihoods. It supports my family education and poverty reduction by raising the income of my poor family and assists with health within my community.

Some respondents indicated that so-called “dependency syndrome” sometimes creates a climate in which remittances are spent unwisely back home. However, in general, most of the respondents agreed that recipients of remittances usually use them for the provision of basic family needs such as medicines, school fees, food, and clothing. Respondents from the Ethiopian Commercial Bank indicated that the diaspora community can utilize foreign cash accounts (hard currency accounts) to buy securities and bonds. In October 2019, the Ethiopian Commercial Bank established a new branch office in Addis Ababa to reach out to the country’s diasporans abroad.

Bridging distances through social media

Cao et al. (2013) argue that social media are the main platforms that connect friends, family members, and acquaintances for social, economic, political, cultural, and other reasons. Putnam (2000) also indicates that bridging social capital is regarded as vital for solving community and family problems. In an attempt to understand bridging distances and changing diaspora relations, this study posed different types of questions, resulting in the expression of a wide range of views by respondents. About 86 percent of respondents agreed that technologies, especially social media, played a critical role in shortening distances and enabling relations with their families, friends, and communities. They also added that the internet and social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Messenger, Instagram, Twitter,

Skype, Viber) have also played an enormous role in the nature of migration and mobility.

The United Ethiopian Community Association in South Africa (UECASA), የኛ ሰው ሚዲያ (Our People Media), ኢትዮ ሰውዝ አፍሪካ (Ethio South Africa), and United Media House offer public broadcasting to inform individuals, groups, and Ethiopian communities on global, national, provincial, and local affairs. These broadcasting channels seek to inform, educate, entertain, and share news about successes within the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa.

As many as 88 percent of the respondents agreed that using social media to communicate with family and friends increased social capital among users. They also indicated that positive experiences like these are important ingredients in developing a growing sense of personal wellbeing and bridging distances between themselves and both Ethiopia and the societal groupings they were involved in in their country of origin. For example, respondents explained that the Ethiopian government's diplomatic mission in South Africa has initiated a wide cluster of activities to stimulate and support networking within the diaspora, especially in the context of diaspora returns and investment in Ethiopia:

I have been living in South Africa for more than fifteen years; the only means to communicate with my extended family members are using social media such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp . . . I can't survive without checking information from Facebook . . . cost-wise, social media are extremely cheap and affordable . . . I send a text message or make a WhatsApp call frequently to my family members in Ethiopia and elsewhere on this planet.

Bridging distances through social media varies depending on the literacy level of individuals and their commitment to attend social gatherings. These meetings range from various types of community and business meetings, orientation on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), investment opportunities, diaspora agency roles and responsibilities, web portals, and others, some of which are facilitated by the Ethiopian government. Information and communication technologies therefore allow diasporans to bridge distances in both space and time. And as Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa increasingly disperse, they can tap into resources and manage distances so that they can invest in Ethiopia.

Cooperation and togetherness (association)

According to Tuomela (1984), the term cooperation is defined as a process of collective social action centered, directly or implicitly, on mutual agreement. Axelrod (2006) notes that the agreement could be either formal or

informal types of togetherness. Clearly, the group members' sense of belonging, acceptance, friendship, affiliation, connection, participation, kinship, loyalty, and partnership emanates from unity and cooperation. This unity encourages community members to participate in a way that benefits social and economic development. About 97 percent of respondents indicated that a large number of Ethiopians are affiliated with Ethiopian diaspora associations, community-based organizations, self-help groups, and ethnic/tribal development associations that exist within the community.

The purpose of these cooperation and togetherness activities is to facilitate diaspora linkages with the home country and to support social and economic development back in Ethiopia. Accordingly, in the past few years, a few Ethiopian associations operating within South Africa, such as UECASA, the Ethiopian Business Association in South Africa, and EthPASA have established links with and supported Ethiopian development. UECASA is a non-profit organization established in 2018 that has a presence at national, provincial, and district levels. The association hosts a substantial Ethiopian diaspora community in South Africa, and it aims to provide "human services" to the Ethiopian community. Many respondents agreed that UECASA provides a wide range of social, cultural, and educational services. According to respondents to my study, in the recent COVID-19 pandemic, for example, UECASA raised more than R1 million and provided food parcels for more than six hundred people affected within the Ethiopian community. There are a few community-based associations in different parts of the Ethiopian community. For example, the Oromia Development Association (ODA) in South Africa was established to mitigate the region's development problems by mobilizing local and external capital. Kembatta Development Association (KDA) aims to make Kembatta people prosperous and progressive: it strives to actively engage in need-based projects and programs such as education, health, and skills training—especially where the government lacks the resources to act—by soliciting funds from members, supporters, and donors and improving community participation. Similarly, Hadiya Development Association (HDA) works towards building a strong community agency that is actively involved in initiatives and services focused on needs such as schooling, health, and skills training.

According to respondents included in my research, EthPASA, founded in 2018, is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit professionals' association, not affiliated to any religious or political organization. It aims to bring Ethiopian professionals in the region together to use their experience and expertise for the greater good of individuals and communities both in Ethiopia and Southern Africa. In Southern Africa in general, and Ethiopia in particular, it works to contribute to the growth of science, technology, and

innovation. The primary members of the association range from students to professionals working in higher education and a number of industries and institutions in the region.

The focus group discussion highlighted the fact that there is already a wide range of forums and resources providing information, advice, resources, and guidelines for further action, including, in some cases, the mechanisms and funding for going forward. Respondents also stated that the government formed the Diaspora Agency to institutionalize and effectively enforce state policy toward the diaspora and to cultivate relations with Ethiopians beyond the country's borders.

Challenges

This research does not propose to review all the challenges that the Ethiopian diaspora faces in South Africa. It examines some of the main issues, explaining the challenges of Ethiopian diasporas. A brief description of the challenges of the Ethiopian diaspora community in South Africa is given below.

Social and economic exclusion

Individuals tend to be socially, economically, and politically excluded based on their country of origin, social status, skin color, race, gender, immigrant background, among other characteristics (Graham 2006). Social exclusion often precludes diasporans from contributing to development and to integrate in their host countries (Collett 2006; Graham 2006).

Respondents were asked a variety of questions that sought to investigate issues relating to the existence of social exclusion within the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa. They reported that the social exclusion of Ethiopian diaspora groups based on ethnic, social, racial, religious, and cultural identities is often the result of a discrimination mechanism, with prejudice leading to xenophobic attacks against foreigners, as occurred in 2008 and 2015. The respondents suggested that they are not completely integrated into their host country and therefore find it difficult to invest themselves in South Africa's growth.

The respondents in this study confirmed that Ethiopian immigrant communities often lack official documentation. As a result, alongside not being able to open bank accounts or access important financial services, some Ethiopians are also treated unfairly. One participant, for example, indicated that xenophobic violence towards foreign nationals usually occurs when immigrant communities protest about their lack of accesses to service. Respondents offered their opinions on the reasons for xenophobia towards the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa, including increased competition for

jobs, resources, housing, and business. They also pointed the finger at Black South Africans as being responsible for most violent assaults against diasporans. One respondent stated:

Financial service providers have very stringent criteria that they easily discriminate against us from accessing financial services. Besides, we do not have proper documents, and we are mostly involved in unregistered small business activities. In this regard, most of the time we are forced to keep cash at our home or in our pockets. This makes us targeted by criminals. Also, we often clash with law enforcement officers and so-called brand ambassadors for common brand goods. The brand ambassadors often bully and harass us for possession of counterfeit goods imported from China and other countries.

Respondents suggested that one solution to such discrimination would be the effective incorporation of diasporans into South African society, as this would improve the capacity of Ethiopian diasporans to participate in social and economic growth. One integration strategy suggested by the respondents would be to provide services and support for diasporans in South Africa, especially in areas such as education, accommodation, health care, and employment.

Immigration documents

About 86 percent of respondents stated that immigration documents are fundamental evidence required by the South African government. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) in South Africa has a variety of temporary statuses that foreigners can apply for if they want to live and work in South Africa temporarily. Residency on other grounds applies to foreigners who: have a permanent work offer in South Africa; “have exceptional skills and qualifications; intend to establish a business in South Africa; qualify as refugees in terms of Section 27I of the Refugees Act; qualify as retired persons; are financially independent; or are relatives (biologically or judicially adopted) of a South African citizen or permanent residence permit holder” (DHA 2020, 20).

However, a number of diaspora communities have been in South Africa for decades and have still not been granted permanent residency. Ethiopian Prime Minister and Nobel Laureate Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali visited the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa on January 12, 2020, at the Wanderers Stadium. At the meeting, the Prime Minister expressed his commitment to discussions with relevant government departments to set up the systems and structures that attract Ethiopian talent back to their home country where they can contribute to the growth and development of Ethiopia.

It is worth noting in this context that the same Prime Minister had introduced the Diaspora Investment Fund, bringing large sums of investment into Ethiopia in the 2019 financial year from all over the world. The Prime Minister also promoted his strategic plan to reinforce bilateral agreements between the Ethiopian and South African governments, making it easier for Ethiopian nationals to obtain immigration documentation. That said, some of the respondents in this study raised concerns that bureaucracies in Ethiopia and South Africa might stifle the activities of diasporas based in both countries.

National identity and citizenship

National identity alludes to a feeling of having a place with one's country of origin (Hogg and Abrams 1988; Hogg and Smith 2007). Most of the time, it is represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language (Huddy and Khatib 2007). About 78 percent of the respondents agreed that legal status (e.g., through citizenship) in both the host nation and nation of origin, could facilitate the social, economic, and political undertakings of the nation conceding it.

During discussion in the focus group, respondents stressed that dual citizenship might help diasporans to integrate. Under the laws of the Ethiopian Immigration and Citizenship Authority (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995), however, people of Ethiopian descent who have migrated and acquired citizenship in another country are not eligible for dual citizenship. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officials stresses that it is the joint responsibility of origin, transit, and destination countries to protect and support diasporas. For Ethiopia to recognize its responsibility to its diasporans by allowing dual citizenship might, therefore, improve social inclusion.

Where diasporans can hold more than one nationality or citizenship, this can enhance their versatility and enhance their ability to work on a number of levels. It has been demonstrated that an effective Ethiopian diaspora network is one that is based in the host nation and well connected to its origin nation. However, as many respondents indicated, this is a two-route process among diasporans and the societal groupings with which they identify, thus increasing their ties to each. The Ethiopian government gives its diaspora members authoritative records in the form of an ID card that testifies to their originating from Ethiopia (Yellow Card). This card confers a number of benefits on diasporans. These include: an entry visa waiver when visiting Ethiopia; not requiring a work permit to apply for any kind of work in Ethiopia; not being considered as foreign nationals. On top of these, the children (under the age of eighteen) of a Yellow Cardholder can enjoy the

same opportunities or provisions as his or her parent(s). This Ethiopian Origin ID Card is issued at the discretion of the Ethiopian Embassy and Department for Immigration and Nationality Affairs.

Respondents additionally stated that national identity is important for a range of various purposes. The Ethiopian Embassy in South Africa believes that, with large Ethiopian communities in South Africa, these diasporas should be seen as “ambassadors” of goodwill for Ethiopia. In addition, Ethiopia’s new Diaspora Policy introduced in 2013 seeks, amongst other things, to strengthen the image of Ethiopia and its values abroad. Respondents concluded that the Ethiopian diaspora could be regarded as “smart citizens” outside the country and should, therefore, be included in the national development agenda. In general, many of the respondents see themselves as potential messengers of harmony and as diplomats for their country of origin.

Respondents commented that the private sector, the public, worldwide associations, and diasporas should cooperate on joint improvement activities and financing for such ventures. According to the information obtained from the Ethiopian diaspora community in South Africa, partnership and collaboration was a well-tried strategy that had several aspects and different success stories. Successful experiences include the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), known in Amharic as ሕዳሴ ግድብ. This is a gravity dam on Ethiopia’s Blue Nile River, built between 2011 and 2022. Respondents from the Ethiopian Embassy in South Africa noted that the diaspora played a creative role in garnering funding collaborations and investing in local development projects. They also stated their belief that the Ethiopian government has developed important frameworks, instruments, and platforms to stimulate diasporans’ investment in Ethiopia. One suggestion that arose was that a joint development initiative could bolster governments’ efforts to draw diasporas into partnerships on community development projects. Respondents also indicated that long-lasting funding opportunities for diaspora and migrant organizations be put in place to facilitate development in Ethiopia.

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As there is not space at present to address all of the challenges faced by the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa in this chapter, I have presented a summary of them in table 5.1, along with brief illustrations of how they have manifested in the interviews conducted for this study.

Table 5.1: Brief illustrations of key challenges of the Ethiopian diaspora in South Africa.

Key challenges summary	Brief illustrations
Social and economic exclusion	Stereotypes associated with the migrants' communities.
Xenophobia	Prejudice and dislike against people from other countries.
Security problem/robbery	Attempted murders, theft, armed robbery, burglary, and hijacking.
Immigration documents	Lack of any type of residence permits issued by the DHA in SA
Corruption	Use of powers by officials/networks for illegitimate private gain.
Banking regulations	Unfavorable rules, restrictions, and guidelines for migrants.
Accommodation	Owners place more stringent obligations on rental property.
Business licensing/registration	The complicated bureaucratic processes involved in licensing/registering.
Language	Communication barrier in finding work, medical care, etc.
Counterfeit goods	Fraudulently using another brand name to cheat consumers.
Business competition	Selling similar products and/or targeting the same customers.
Team spirit/cooperation	Lack of an attitude that enables people to work well together.
Intergenerational gaps	Differences in opinions, beliefs, and values between generations.

Conclusion

Ethiopian diaspora communities in South Africa have very distinctive characteristics and have developed their own connections to both Ethiopia and South Africa. They often act as bridges by facilitating the flow of resources and enhancing the social, political, and financial connections between these countries. Involving Ethiopian diasporans in national development plans can therefore ensure the successful implementation of development projects and programs both at home and abroad.

My research identified that Ethiopian diasporans in South Africa can possibly play a significant role by connecting and bestowing advantages upon their host nation and country of origin. Firstly, the diaspora's assets, both monetary and nonmonetary, can benefit endeavors to advance Ethiopian interests in their families, communities, and at a national level, so long as an enabling environment is in place that will engage all diasporans. Secondly, effective and successful utilization of the development potential of Ethiopian diasporans requires systematic partnerships among all stakeholders. Engaging the diaspora community at large helps to develop common visions, goals, and cooperation among various actors while empowering diasporans to initiate projects or programs that will improve the lot of people living in both Ethiopia and South Africa.

In the light of my research, a few recommendations are worth noting here. First, it would be helpful if all actors and stakeholders could jointly contribute to ensuring that Ethiopian diaspora policies are directed towards creating an enabling environments that foster integration and inclusion; this environment might include the likes of granting of dual citizenship and the right to vote to diasporans. Secondly, the level of all stakeholders and Ethiopian diaspora participation needs to be intensified. This would help increase the sense of ownership and strengthen relations with government while also establishing communication channels and contact between government agencies and diaspora communities. Thirdly, round tables and workshops should be organized at which diasporans can exchange information and experiences. Such workshops would offer open doors for a conversation on strategy options and execution systems at district, regional, and national levels. Lastly, further research and reviews that investigate activities of the Ethiopian diaspora at all levels in South Africa be undertaken.

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Chapter 6

Ethiopians in Australia

Race, Ethnicity, and Othering

Hewan Girma

When I left Ethiopia to come to Australia, I was not destitute. I was a well-educated director of a respected NGO. Yet the label “Ethiopian” made me poor in the eyes of almost every Australian I ever met. Despite having Western qualifications and experience, I was still not Western enough . . . my knowledge and experience was reduced to nothing. . . . I became a security guard. (Woldeyes 2016a, 65)

The above excerpt is from the creative nonfiction of Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes, an Ethiopian scholar, poet, and educator residing in Perth, Australia. Born in Lalibela, Ethiopia, Woldeyes started his educational journey in the traditional learning system spearheaded by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He then pursued western-style education, receiving his bachelor’s degree in law in Ethiopia, which enabled him to teach law and work with grassroots organizations. He migrated to Australia after the publication of his first book *The Cry of Mountains* (2006) a collection of poetry written in Amharic. He followed his then-wife who had already migrated to Australia with their twin girls around 2007. After struggling to find work with his law degree from Ethiopia, he undertook a doctorate in Australia and currently works as a researcher and lecturer at the Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University in Perth, Australia (Sheger 2020). His research, poetry, and creative non-fiction writing focus on indigenous knowledge, education, culture, development, law, and politics (Woldeyes 2016b). Woldeyes particularly writes about being Black in Australia, providing insightful commentary on Ethiopian and, more generally, African migrants’ diasporic condition and processes of othering they often undergo in their host nations. For instance,

at Bread & Butter, a monthly dinner and storytelling event hosted by the Centre for Stories, Woldeyes (2019) shared stories of his homeland and the confrontation staged by being a Black man in Australia:

I didn't know I was a black man before I came to Australia. . . . I turned up in Australia and slowly I started to understand that there is actually a subtle meaning of what black people are. So, through the immigration process, through work, there is that usual phrase, "Ah, you are from Africa? You must be very happy; you must be very lucky!" So, this reminds us of a certain narrative about blackness with which I struggle. . . . That is a story of me about being black—the fact that I didn't know I was black before I came here.

Similarly, in the postscript to his poem "I Have No Country," Woldeyes states that he wrote it as a reflection on "that question often asked of Black people: 'Where is your country?' So often, this is not a genuine question, but one that seeks to decenter us from the place where we live and call home. Additionally, so often the answer is already assumed, that we must come from some place of suffering" (2022, 124). Woldeyes (2019) identifies two types of Africa: the Africa he grew up in and the "imagined Africa" that lives in the minds of (white) people, broadcasted through the media that has little to do with the way Africans live and experience life on the continent. When white Australians find out he is from Ethiopia, "they furrow their brow in sympathy and mutter heartfelt condolences for some unspoken perceived struggle" making assumptions about a supposed refugee background (Woldeyes 2016a, 66). In these short excerpts, it is plain to see white Australians' unabashed expectation of gratitude and subtle self-congratulations for "saving" the poor African. The only reference point most white Australians have for Ethiopia is the devastating famine that took place in the 1980s, an image that has staying power despite the decades that have elapsed since.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the Ethiopian diaspora in a less studied part of the world: Australia, a Global North country geographically located in the southern hemisphere. Ethiopians have a fairly recent migration history in Australia and their numbers are much smaller in comparison to similar diasporic communities in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and South Africa. Drawing from primary empirical data and an extensive review of the literature, the paper will delve into the experiences of the Ethiopian diaspora situated in this part of the globe to fill an important gap of our understanding of how different geographies affect settlement patterns. It will focus in particular on the racialization processes that Ethiopian immigrants undergo as Black Africans in a white hegemonic society. As the Ethiopian diaspora in Australia has remained largely uncharted to date, it is

the hope of this chapter to provide some introductory insights into the topic and serve as the starting point for future research.¹

Formal and informal Ethio-Australian relations

Before delving into the experiences of Ethiopians in Australia, it is important to highlight some key elements that form the historical connections between Ethiopia and Australia. For some Ethiopians, the most memorable link between the two countries is the eucalyptus tree, locally named *Bahir Zaf*, which literally translates as the “tree from across the sea.” The eucalyptus tree was introduced to Ethiopia in 1895, over a century ago, to “alleviate shortage of firewood and construction wood in the capital, Addis Ababa” (Aklilu et al. 2019, 75–76). Emperor Menelik II (1868–1907) introduced eucalyptus, a tree native to Australia and Tasmania, to Ethiopia, raising the seedlings in the palace nursery and distributing them freely to landowners, incentivizing them with tax relief (Bayle 2019). The eucalyptus tree is now ubiquitous throughout Ethiopia and put to manifold uses providing “fuel wood, construction material, scaffold, transmission pole, timber etc.” (Bayle 2019, 93–94).

Another Australian transplant to Ethiopia was the medical couple Dr. Catherine Hamlin (1924–2020) and her New Zealander husband Dr. Reginald Hamlin (1908–93), who both trained as obstetricians and gynecologists. The couple first visited Ethiopia in 1959 during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie on a short contract to train midwives; by 1974, they had founded the Hamlin Fistula Hospital, dedicated to the treatment and prevention of childbirth injuries known as obstetric fistulas. In addition to the main hospital in Addis Ababa, Dr. Hamlin established the Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation and a network of five regional fistula hospitals in different parts of the country with high rates of fistula cases. Dr. Hamlin is lauded as one of the foremost Australians to have dedicated her life to Ethiopia and Ethiopian women, more specifically. She is considered to be an honorary Ethiopian.²

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- 1 The author would like to thank Shimelis Gulema and Mulugeta F. Dinbabo for their assistance in identifying interview participants and providing critical feedback on earlier drafts of this essay.
 - 2 Perhaps lesser known than Catherine Hamlin and the Fistula Foundation, we can also cite Jacqui Gilmour and her foundation Hope for Children (est. 2004), an Australian NGO headquartered in Perth, focused on education, youth health and livelihood programs in Ethiopia. Jacqui Gilmour, together with her husband Graham Forward, has adopted four children from Ethiopia.

Another lens through which we can explore Ethiopian-Australian relations is transnational adoption. Between the early 1990s and 2018, Ethiopia became a significant source country for adoptable children. An estimated fifty thousand children migrated from Ethiopia under different adoption schemes to the Global North (Girma and Abebe 2023). While Australia was not a significant destination compared to the US (Australia received less than a thousand compared to over fifteen thousand Ethiopia-origin adoptees in the US), it is nonetheless worth considering that the Ethiopia program was once Australia's fourth largest inter-country adoption program, after China, the Philippines and Thailand. It was the only such program with an African country and has seen 621 Ethiopian children come to Australia since it began in 1990 (Rotabi 2010). Due to documented abuses and unethical practices, the Australian government first suspended adoption from Ethiopia in 2009 for one year, and later, in 2012, shut down the program, years before the Ethiopian government banned the practice altogether in 2018.

Ethiopian adoptees in Australia represent a unique part of the diasporic experience.³ Although it is not the intent of this chapter to delve deeply into the unique journey and circumstances of transnational adoptees, it is important to mention one famous Ethiopian-born Australian adoptee that has caught public attention and is becoming a rising celebrity. Tsehay Hawkins (b. 2005) is an Ethiopian-origin adoptee, adopted at five months old and raised in Australia by white parents in Bargo (an hour southwest of Sydney). An early childhood singer and dancer, Tsehay has won many dance competitions and even appeared on Australian variety TV show "Little Big Shots" before landing a permanent gig at age fifteen on the widely popular The Wiggles, a multi-award-winning Australian children's music group established in 1991.

Tsehay has an article in *Vogue Australia* where she talks about her adoption, her love for dance, and the importance of representation while unapologetically sporting a huge afro in the picture accompanying the article (Hawkins and Xidias 2022). *The Guardian* similarly included a piece on her, in which she discusses, among other things, taking pride in her natural hairstyle and being a positive representation for Black children (Blake 2021). This is important because Black hair can be a source of discrimination in white hegemonic societies, such as Australia, where recent news stories of Black Australian students being harassed and suspended for wearing braids,

She has also founded The School of St. Yared with Yared Wolde, one of the young men she sponsored through her organization.

- 3 For instance, Meseret Cohen is an Ethiopian-born transnational adoptee in Australia who was featured in the short documentary *The Walk* (35 mins, 2021). Adopted at thirteen, Meseret discusses the loss of her birth parents and growing up as an adopted teenager in Busselton, Perth, Australia.

dreadlocks, and other African hairstyles have generated heated discussion online and in podcasts, and even became the topic of a bachelor's thesis (Konneh 2013). A Black Australian icon such as Tsehay speaking out about the issue therefore makes a powerful statement.

Since 2003, Australia's government-funded public service Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) have offered programming in Amharic (SBS Amharic). The Australian federal government identified a need for "ethnic broadcasting" in the mid-1970s, as immigration to the country was increasingly diverse after the end of the White Australia policy (discussed in more detail below). SBS includes TV channels, radio networks, and special services in Amharic, as well as podcasts on issues concerning the Ethiopian community in Australia and in the homeland. Since September 2007, successive Australian Prime Ministers and opposition leaders have appeared on SBS Radio to wish a Happy New Year to Ethiopians in Australia, an act that is not replicated elsewhere in the world. The sheer existence of SBS Amharic and the yearly greeting from the highest office in government are both indications of the significance of the Ethiopian migrant population in Australia.

Brief Overview of Ethiopian Settlement in Australia

While Ethiopians have a fairly recent history of migration to Australia, this history resembles Ethiopian migration to other Global North countries. The first arrivals can be traced to students in the 1960s for educational purposes. Emperor Haile Selassie's visit to Australia in May 1968⁴ could be said to

4 Emperor Haile Selassie's grandson Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie, President of the Crown Council of Ethiopia, visited Australia between June 18 and July 1, 2017, commemorating the Emperor's State Visit to Australia in 1968. Prince Ermias gave an address at The State Reception Centre in Perth, Australia (June 29, 2017) on "The Importance of Ethiopian-Australian Relations." In this address, Prince Ermias highlighted his grandfather's love for Australian horses and the eucalyptus link. He states: "for me, my first scent of Australia was a scent of home" because "we had the scent of Australia because of the eucalyptus groves which Emperor Menelik II planted around Addis Ababa to reforest the city as he built it in the late 19th Century." Prince Ermias's visit to Australia followed in the footsteps of his grandfather's state visit, laying a wreath in a similar location at the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, planting a tree using the same spade his grandfather had used near the tree planted there half a century ago by the Emperor at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne. See *The Australian Financial Review*, June 22, 2017.

have marked the beginning of Ethiopian migration to Australia.⁵ During Emperor Haile Selassie's reign (1930–74), a small number of Ethiopians (estimated to be twenty thousand between 1941 and 1974) migrated abroad to obtain training and higher education and serve as diplomatic liaisons (Zewde 2002). This is a period that also saw a high rate of return migration as the newly western-educated elites came back to occupy coveted government positions.

The major dispersal of Ethiopians started with turmoil of the Derg regime (1974–91), particularly due to the *Qey Shibir* (Red Terror) where the state in effect terrorized its own people. An estimated half a million Ethiopians fled to the neighboring countries of Sudan and Kenya. While this massive wave of emigration led to the emergence of a “victim diaspora”—defined as a group formed through involuntary displacement marked by trauma (Cohen 1997; 2008)—in Africa, North America, and Europe, a smaller number of Ethiopians were resettled in Australia. Insurgency movements that had proliferated since the late 1970s, combined with the fall of the USSR in 1989, eventually led to the demise of the Derg in 1991.⁶ The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition replaced the Derg in 1991 with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) as the dominant faction. This period saw a rise in ethnic tensions in the country, peppered with periods of active war with neighboring Eritrea, especially between 1998 and 2000.⁷ In the mid 2010s, the Ethiopian government experienced a seismic internal shift first with Hailemariam Desalegn becoming Prime Minister in 2012 and later orchestrating a peaceful handover of power to Abiy Ahmed in 2018. Abiy Ahmed's rise to power was accompanied by years of demonstrations by the Amhara, Oromo, and those from other regions of the country who felt sidelined by the ruling TPLF elite. The break within the government invariably led to a civil conflict arising in the Tigray region in November 2020. In November 2022, two years after the start

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- 5 According to one study participant, Ethiopia's arguably pioneer immigrant to Australia was a young member of the Ethiopian emperor's entourage who decided to stay in Australia. He got married to a member of the Native Australian community and bore several children.
 - 6 During the Derg's rule, two additional large-scale humanitarian disasters took place: first, the Ogaden war in 1977–78, a border dispute with neighboring Somalis; and second, the famine in the mid-1980s. All of these events combined to contribute to the massive internal and international displacement of Ethiopians. The Derg years also saw student migration to socialist countries such as Cuba, East Germany, and the USSR. This aspect of Ethiopian migration has received less attention in scholarship to date.
 - 7 Eritrea, which was a province of Ethiopia, declared independence in 1993 and became a sovereign country.

of the conflict, a peace agreement was signed between the government of Ethiopia and the warring factions bringing an end to a civil war that has been responsible for the massive loss of life and the displacement of millions of Ethiopians, particularly from the provinces as Gondar and Tigray, which were especially badly affected.

The majority of Ethiopian migrants arrived in Australia after 1991,⁸ and, more specifically, after 2000, with over three thousand Ethiopian refugees settling in Australia between 2000 and 2005 (Evason 2018). They were granted humanitarian visas (65%) or family visas (33%). The Australian government granted a further 1,345 humanitarian visas to Ethiopian refugees between 2012 and 2017 (Evason 2018). Since the Australian Government has placed restrictions on family visas and parent visa migration, many older family members of Ethiopian refugees have been unable to or have chosen not to come to Australia. Since only 2.5 percent of the Ethiopian-born population in Australia was over sixty-five years old in 2016, older Ethiopians are at risk of marginalization from aged care policies in Australia and experience “care poverty” and/or “care inequality” as they have a myriad of unmet needs (Fernandez and Athukorala 2022).

According to 2021 census data,⁹ 16,922 Australian residents have Ethiopian ancestry, an increase from 2016 where 13,716 people claimed Ethiopian ancestry. In terms of home languages, there are 8,161 Amharic speakers, 6,253 Tigrigna speakers, 4,310 Oromo speakers, and 662 Harari speakers.¹⁰ While the Tigrigna speakers may originate from either Ethiopia or Eritrea, all the other languages indicate a primarily Ethiopian origin.

8 Despite its large territory, Australia only has a little over twenty-five million residents, which represents an increase of 8.6% from 2016, according to 2021 census data.

9 Some of the best publicly available data sources on Australian immigration comes from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Department of Home Affairs (DoHA), the CDATE Census, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), and from SBS Australian Census Explorer. The ABS administers the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing, which collects a range of demographic and socioeconomic data on all peoples in Australia in snapshot form. Data regarding “country of birth” of individuals and their parents can be cross-tabulated with a range of indicators to yield information about the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of African-born people living in Australia. These different data sources were systematically reviewed to inform the analysis presented in this chapter.

10 This variable is created from responses to the question on the language used at home. Respondents may either use a tick box to indicate the language used at home or write the name of the language in the text field. When a person selects more than one language or selects a language and gives a text response,

According to the 2016 census, Ethiopia-born populations in Australia exhibit high levels of religiosity. More than 75 percent of Amharic speakers adhere to some form of Christianity with a heavy representation of Orthodox Christians (about 45%), while 77 percent of Oromo speakers adhere to Islam. Comparing religiosity to the overall Australian population, people of Ethiopian origin tended to report higher religious observance: close to 40 percent of Australian population identifies itself as having no religion at all.

Regarding geographic distribution, the majority of Ethiopians in Australia (54%) live in Victoria—namely Melbourne and surrounding areas. According to Tefera and Gamlen, “Ethiopian-born people living in Australia have significantly lower employment rates, incomes, and qualifications than the rest of the Australian population. They were less likely to work in professional, managerial, and technical occupations and more likely to work in community and personal service occupations, as laborers, machine operators or drivers” (2021, 6). According to the authors, this reflects the “recency and humanitarian backgrounds” of Ethiopian migrants and not necessarily their skill level. Despite this lower class standing in Australian society, Ethiopian migrants send a significant amount of money to their home country in the form of remittances. According to World Bank data, Ethiopia received a total of US\$ 504 million in remittances in 2020, this represents 0.5 percent of the total GDP of the country. According to the Migration Policy Institute’s (2014) analysis of World Bank data on annual remittance inflows and outflows, Ethiopian migrants from Australia (about ten thousand of them) sent a total of US\$ 8.3 million in remittances in 2012 (according to the latest data that disaggregates based on country of origin). As the level of remittances is one method of gauging engagement between a diaspora and its home country, the number of remittances from Ethiopian migrants in Australia is not negligible, especially in light of their comparatively small number and the recency of their migration to the country.

“White Australia” and the Making of an African-Australian Identity

Australia is historically a “white settler” country with a history of genocide and racial segregation. The legacy of dispossession of indigenous Australians, the original occupants of the land prior to white colonial incursion is a significant part of the foundational history of the modern Australian state. Moreover, starting in 1901, the government instituted a racially selective

responses are accepted in the order in which they appear on the form and the extra response is rejected.

immigration policy known as the “White Australia” policy, which was in place in some form until the mid-1970s.¹¹ The “White Australia” policy was a set of historical policies aimed at restricting non-white people from immigrating and settling in the country, as the national identity of Australia was premised on maintaining the white racial purity and cultural homogeneity of the country. The exclusion of “others” based on race was not just a legal policy but one that is embedded in the social psychology of mainstream society. The “White Australia” policy was progressively dismantled after World War II, leading to a significant demographic shift that increased ethnoracial diversity in turn (Gatwiri and Anderson 2021). This history is an important background for understanding the racial and political landscape Ethiopian migrants encounter both upon arrival and during settlement.

Until the mid-1970s, the only “Africans” who legally migrated to Australia were predominantly white South Africans and white Zimbabweans (Abur 2022). It was only after the Australian government repealed the racially discriminatory “White Australia” policy that Black African people started to migrate there (Gatwiri and Anderson 2021). As reported by Abur (2022), the 2020 census recorded that over four hundred thousand people living in Australia were of African origin.¹² This represents 1.6 percent of the Australian population and 5.1 percent of Australia’s overseas-born population. Most of the migrants with African ancestry (58%) are white South Africans, but 42 percent are Black Africans from sub-Saharan African countries (Fozdar et al. 2022). In other words, a large proportion of Africa-born migrants living in Australia are white.

Black Africans can legally enter and settle in Australia through one of two main ways: first, the humanitarian program for resettlement of refugees; and, second, the migration program for family-based and skilled work migration. Those who enter through the humanitarian program are hyper-visible, both in the media and scholarly studies. By comparison, those who enter through a variety of temporary migration programs, including as skilled workers and international students, are less conspicuous. While a significant body of empirical and theoretical work on the experiences of African migrants has been growing in the last couple of years, Gatwiri and Anderson (2021) characterize research on skilled African migrants or second/third generation migrants as an “emerging field.” Regardless of their legal path of settlement, African migrants may not necessarily be aware of Australia’s insidious history

11 Elements of the “White Australia” policy started to emerge in 1850 and then culminated in an Act in 1901. See Hiruy and Hutton 2019 for a more detailed analysis.

12 According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2017), the top ten African ancestries in Australia are: South African (30%), Egyptian (13%), African “unspecified” (10%), Mauritian (8%), Sudanese (5%), Zimbabwean (4%), Somali (4%), Ethiopian (3%), South Sudanese (3%), and Eritrean (2%).

of white supremacy, but most often experience its reverberations in their daily lives.

Black Africans have quite a challenging time settling in Australian society due to high levels of unemployment, language barriers, racism, and discrimination. African Australian researchers have theorized the Black body as a racial battleground (Gatwiri and Moran 2023; Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama 2018). In a society where hegemonic whiteness has been the norm for centuries, the Black body is targeted, policed, criminalized, and brutalized (Gatwiri and Moran 2023). The literature highlights an anti-Blackness prevalent in Australian society which leads to the hyper-criminalization of Black people and their over-policing both from the community and the criminal justice system. In the mid-2010s, the media and some politicians propagated an unsubstantiated “African gangs” narrative targeting “African youth,” particularly those of South Sudanese origin, as the source of gang-related drugs and violence problems. The moral panic created by these false narratives of racialized criminality and anti-Black rhetoric and recurrent media stigmatization leads to increased experiences of “everyday racism” and exclusion for Black African immigrants (Udah and Singh 2018).

As with other African communities in Australia, Ethiopians are sometimes the target of intolerance and hostility from the Australian public. According to the Scanlon Foundation’s 2015 survey, 60 percent of Ethiopians said they had experienced discrimination in the past twelve months living in Australia (Markus 2016). For instance, in Melbourne, Ethiopian youths shared their African peers’ experience of being heavily policed, garnering a sense of shared place in the city as “African-Australians” (Trujillo-Pagán 2019). Trujillo-Pagán (2019) also found archives of Australian articles (for instance, in *The Age* online) in which Ethiopians are targets of racism. A lot of African migrants not used to being racialized in their own racially homogenous societies “become” Black when entering the hegemonic white spaces in Australia (similar to what was described by Woldeyes at the beginning of this chapter). The process of becoming Black can be confusing for those unfamiliar with the racial script and history of the land. At the same time, the exclusion and common adversity that Africans experience, denying them a sense of place and belonging, can unintentionally build diaspora consciousness and pan-African resistance.

African-Australian

The label of “African-Australian” has emerged in the last couple of decades as an umbrella term to designate a diverse group of individuals, with both positive and negative repercussions. In a study that investigates the views of 1.5- and second-generation (those who either migrated to Australia before

age twelve or were born there, respectively) youths of Ethiopian, South Sudanese, Eritrean, and Djiboutian background, Gebrekidan (2016) offers an interesting and nuanced discussion of the label African-Australian. On the negative side, not only is the label African-Australian too simplistic, but it also forcibly homogenizes the extraordinarily diverse groups of Africans in Australia. The label reinforces a presumption of racial, ethnic, and cultural uniformity and flattens the diversity of Africans. Despite most white Australians being ignorant of the plurality, this new African diaspora is highly diverse along national, racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines. According to one study, “emphatic accounts that ‘there is no one African culture’ surfaced across our interviews and surveys. For example, one survey participant commented, ‘I think the average Aussie does not know that Africa is not a country’” (Hiruy and Hutton 2019, 162). The label thus reinforces the stereotype of “Africa as one country,” erasing African immigrants’ extremely heterogeneous backgrounds. Additionally, the label “African-Australian” runs into problems with hyphenated identities, contributing negatively towards the problem of being perceived as an eternal immigrant or a permanent outsider where the bearer is African first, Australian second. Such a label thus contributes to the problem of othering, particularly as it is laden with negative connotations and often used in relation to criminality (Majavu 2020).

On the positive side, however, “African-Australian” can be thought of as a pan-Africanist identity label, embraced by some as it transcends the respective nationality backgrounds and ethno-cultural affiliations. It is a practical label that emphasizes commonality and constructs racial solidarity. As an already minority population, holding a united African voice may be in the greater interests of the communities, putting forth an argument by strength in numbers (Hiruy and Hutton 2019). It can be a pragmatic label and tool for advocacy that enables those of African descent to stand together to fight for their rights. Some have taken to social media to counter these negative representations and (re)claim the (problematic) label, while detoxifying its imposed negative connotations.

Others have used the label “African-Australian” to underscore racial solidarity between indigenous peoples and African groups arguing that the liberation of Black Africans in Australia is tied to that of Australia’s First Nation Peoples. They seek to highlight linkages between contemporary and early colonial anti-Blackness in Australia (Gatwiri and Moran 2023), drawing obvious parallels between movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #AboriginalLivesMatter. Australian researchers on the Black experience are increasingly adopting critical race theory to study local histories underscoring the disenfranchisement of non-white populations (e.g., Bargallie and Lentin 2022). Such work engages with colonial histories to contextualize

Afrodiasporic experiences in Australia and argue that “the conditional acceptance of Black bodies within Australian spaces is contingent upon the status quo of the white hegemony” (Gatwiri and Anderson 2021, 1). To illustrate, the story “In Search of the Kole” by Woldeyes (2018) compares the experiences of African-Australians and indigenous Australians, exploring different geographies within Australia, existential attachment to place, and its non-material or spiritual significance.

Regardless of the label African-Australian, racism, the lack of belonging, social exclusion, everyday microaggressions, and economic hardships can have long-term negative consequences on the mental and physical health of people of African descent, surfacing as “chronic racial trauma which can be manifested through mental, emotional, and physical and psychological exhaustion” (Gatwiri and Moran 2023, 2). There is, for instance, an increased rate of suicide among African youths in Australia (Mude and Mwanri 2020). In Australia’s South Sudanese community, men exhibit a high number of suicides and mental health issues due to their hyper-racialization and hyper-criminalization (Gatwiri and Moran 2023). For African Australians exhausted by “racial battle fatigue,” maintaining racial dignity is both of paramount importance and a challenging task (Gatwiri and Anderson 2021).

Methodology

This chapter draws from eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with Ethiopian-origin migrants currently residing in Australia. In order to obtain a range of experiences, the sample of respondents is comprised of adoptees, refugees, and skilled migrants, including four women and four men, ranging in age from twenty-four to sixty-four years. The study participants lived in Australia for between eleven and twenty-six years, with an average of nineteen. Participants were geographically dispersed through the different cities and states of Australia with the following breakdown: one participant was from Perth (Western Australia), two from Brisbane (Queensland) and five from Melbourne (Victoria). Interview participants were solicited through personal networks and referrals. For the adoptees in the sample, targeted social media adverts were placed strategically in Ethiopian adoptee groups. All the interviews were conducted between 2021 and 2022 over zoom, either in English or Amharic (one of the Ethiopian languages), recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using an open coding system. Where the interviews were conducted in Amharic, the English translations provided below are my own. The interviews generally lasted about an hour, ranging from fifty minutes to one and a half hours in length.

Table 6.1: Demographic distribution of study participants

Name*	Gender	Age	No. of years in Australia	City (Region)	Transit Coun- try (if any)	Method of Migration	Occupation
Mena	F	24	21	Melbourne (Victoria)	None	Adoptee	Gig economy
Yordanos	F	26	13	Perth (Western Australia)	None	Adoptee	Fashion industry
Lenssa	F	36	21	Melbourne (Victoria)	Kenya (1yr)	Refugee	Nursing
Hiwot	F	37	21	Melbourne (Victoria)	Kenya (1yr)	Refugee	Nursing
Yacob	M	38	14	Melbourne (Victoria)	None	Skilled Migrant	Research/Teaching
Dawit	M	52	11	Brisbane (Queensland)	South Africa (8yrs)	Refugee	Taxi driver
Marcos	M	56	25	Melbourne (Victoria)	Kenya (1yr)	Refugee	Journalist
Tekle	M	64	26	Brisbane (Queensland)	Djibouti (1yr)	Refugee	Church pastor and business owner

*All the names of the study participants have been changed to protect their identity.

As reflexivity is an important component of qualitative research methodologies (Kusow 2003), I explicate my positionality as an insider-outsider to my study participants. As an Ethiopian living outside of my homeland for the majority of my life, I am intimately familiar with the experiences and challenges of diasporic populations in the Global North. At the same time, however, as I do not live in Australia, I am an outsider to this particular context. This can be interpreted as a strength because my lack of familiarity with the particular geography of Australia means that I will not take anything for granted. The participants were in general comfortable talking about their positive and negative experiences as migrants living in Australia.

Discussion/Themes

Below I discuss the multifaceted experiences of Ethiopian migrants in Australia, starting from the time spent in transit countries to the challenging realities upon settlement. Based on participant responses, I focus in particular on ethnic divisions imported from the homeland and race-based discrimination in a historically white settler society.

Migration Paths, Non-Linear Mobility, and Settlement

The experiences of the participants in this study provide a snapshot of the different means of migration of Ethiopians in Australia. While two of the participants are adoptees, one is a skilled migrant and the rest initially arrived in Australia as refugees. Those with a refugee background have lived in an African transit country for at least one year before migrating to Australia. For instance, Hiwot arrived in Australia aged sixteen in 2002 together with her parents and siblings after staying in Kenya for one year. Her transition to life in Melbourne was not too challenging for her as she had the support of her immediate family and credits her younger age for the experience of a smoother transition. She also thinks of her time in Kenya as a sort of a buffer between her Ethiopian homeland and her new country, Australia.

Tekle spent close to a year in Djibouti before continuing to Australia. He explains:

I am originally from the Axum area, although I lived mostly in other places [within Ethiopia]. I came to Australia in 1996. It has been about twenty-six to twenty-seven years now. I came via Djibouti in May 1996 where I was imprisoned for about ten months. That period changed my life forever.

When I first came to Australia, my children were six and eight years old. Now, they've finished their university studies, they're married, and they each have two children. I am a pastor at one of the local churches and run my own private business.

Compared to Hiwot and Tekle, Dawit has one of the longest transit periods with eight years in South Africa before permanently migrating to Australia. He explains: "I am originally from the southern part of Ethiopia. I left Ethiopia in 2003 and went to South Africa. I came from Cape Town to Australia in 2011." Although this is outside of the purview of this chapter, this prevalent trend of the time spent in transit countries undoubtedly has an impact on the lives of Ethiopian-Australians in their new places of settlement. For instance, Tekle confirms this trend among his congregation and the Ethiopian-Australian population more broadly. He says: "people come from a lot of different transit countries, from South Africa, Egypt or Sudan," and notes cultural differences among them based on the country of transit regarding church management and worship practices. Even Yordanos, an adoptee who did not have the personal experience of a transit country, states that her partner of Ethiopian descent was born in Sudan to his Ethiopian mother while she was a refugee: "My partner, we've been together for a year. He's Ethiopian but was born and grew up in Sudan. This is not uncommon for a lot of Ethiopians in Australia."

The significance of long transit periods is echoed in other studies. According to Tefera and Gamlen's study on temporal logics (2021), the typical Ethiopian migrant in Australia has engaged in non-linear mobility, a practice that is seemingly becoming increasingly standard amongst migrants from Africa. They found that migrants spent an average of eleven years in transit (ranging from four to twenty-one years) with men spending a slightly longer time compared to women (Tefera and Gamlen 2021). According to another study, African migration streams are "unfixed and overlapping; for instance, some participants started their journey as skilled migrants, and then, owing to personal and political circumstances, settled in Australia as refugees. It was also common for participants to have lived in at least one additional country before settling in Australia—many as asylum seekers, but also as students and trainees" (Hiruy and Hutton 2019, 160).

The trajectories that the refugees took to arrive in Australia is also noteworthy. Most left during the Derg regime or fled after the unrest following the Ethio-Eritrean War (1998–2000) and Ethiopia's contested 2005 election. Most entered neighboring countries through irregular migration, trekking by foot or with the help of smugglers. Once recognized by the UNHCR as refugees, they lived either in refugee camps such as Kakuma and Dadaab in Kenya, or as urban refugees with a government-issued "alien card." While in transit, they survived with the support of families, friends,

and NGOs and by engaging in informal trading. They experienced exploitation at the hands of the local population, high rates of unemployment, discrimination, and constant fear of harassment from police. Those that transited through South Africa had a slightly better experience, although the initial journey from Ethiopia to South Africa was harrowing. All were working in the informal economy in the transit countries, which rendered them vulnerable to robbery and xenophobic attacks (Tefera and Gamlen 2021).

The expectation of these migrants is that after the sometimes prolonged and often challenging times they have spent in transit countries, their settlement in Australia will be more agreeable. Although this is not always the case, Ethiopians (re)created communities that helped them survive and thrive in Australia. In fact, the Ethiopian community has grown significantly in the last twenty years or so. According to Tekle, who first moved to Brisbane in 1996 after spending a year in transit in Djibouti, the Ethiopian community in Australia has grown significantly in the quarter of a century he has lived there. In his own words:

When I first came to Brisbane, there were only about fifty Habesha¹³ people, Ethiopians, and Eritreans. Now we're about ten thousand or so. Surprisingly, we don't even know most of their names. It was such a small community before. We started our church in 1997 with only three to four people. There was one church in Melbourne, another in Sidney, another one in Adelaide, another in Perth. There was a total of six [Ethiopian protestant] churches in all of Australia. Just like any church in the diaspora, we grew in numbers as new people, refugees mostly, came. We would minister to them and help them settle. Our church really helps with setting them up at the beginning because it is hard to be a new immigrant in a new land, so we help them acclimatize to the country. This is one of our key services. I remember when I first came from Djibouti, I only had one piece of luggage and 50 francs in my pocket. Some of the sisters I met gave me some plates and other household items to set me up at the beginning, so I understand the struggle. Now I have my own house, three cars, two kids, and four grandkids. This is me now. I have been blessed. When I meet a newcomer from the airport, I know that tomorrow they will reach the same levels as I have. After two or three years, they become pillars of the community.

Dawit migrated to Australia in 2011 from Ethiopia after living in South Africa for eight years. The government organization Multicultural Development Australia welcomed him when he first arrived in Brisbane, providing him with government housing and other forms of assistance. Since then, he has settled in Australian society with his wife and two daughters. In

13 *Habesha* is a general term that some Ethiopians and Eritreans use to refer to themselves.

general, Australia is an attractive destination for migrants because of its policies as a welfare state. Commenting on the economic activities of Ethiopian immigrants in Australia, Dawit states:

Compared to other African immigrants, Ethiopians and Eritreans work very hard. Everyone is employed. No one is living off the state. A lot of the other immigrants, you see them loitering around in recreational areas, restaurants, etc. Ethiopians however, we work. We take on any jobs. We are not selective. In the diaspora we will do anything, any type of job. There is no big or small job. There is no job that we look upon with disdain. All jobs are equal, and we are successful. We work not just for ourselves but also for those left back in the home country. We need to support ourselves here and our families back home. There are those that work two or three jobs or very long hours. There is no one that is a burden to anyone.

Similarly, Tekle describes the variety of jobs that Ethiopians engage in Australia. While he describes how hard it can sometimes be for newcomers to negotiate between their expectations and reality, wrongly expecting “the streets to be paved with gold” he comments on the hard-working nature of the Ethiopian community:

If we use our church as a microcosm of the larger Ethiopian/Eritrean community, we can get a sense of the larger picture. For instance, I have a full-time job. I start in the early morning, 4am until noon, lunchtime. . . . We have a lot of taxi drivers, laborers such as cleaners, engineers. We have a lot of nurses, youth workers, people who work in health areas such as nursing home, disability services. There are those that own their own businesses, including myself. I have a driving school. . . . There are restaurant owners. There are a lot of people who have their own taxis, drive for Uber or are truck drivers. A lot of the women work in aged care and in healthcare more generally. Some work in real estate.

While the majority of the Ethiopian population in Australia arrived as refugees, through humanitarian visas, Yacob came to Australia in 2008 at the age of twenty-four to pursue a Masters, followed by a doctoral degree in computer science. He is one of the skilled migrants that Australia seeks to attract. Reflecting on his migration path to Australia, he states:

There are generally two paths: a refugee path or a skilled migrant path. Australia has this very defined skilled migrant program where, essentially, they want to attract certain types of skills into the country. There are defined programs on what those skills are, the criteria you need to meet, to qualify, and so on. There’s a points-based system which basically, kind of clearly defines whether you’re the type of talent they want. In a sense, it’s like trying to attract talent into the country for the areas that they want to have more development in Australia. I, for instance, went through such a

program. I did my PhD here. It was in computer science and IT, which the country really valued.

Regardless of the method of migration, the length of time in transit (if any), and the type of employment available upon settlement, there are certain common realities that Ethiopians in Australia encounter. Namely, they must navigate the ethno-national landscape imported from the homeland and encounters of racism in a white settler society, topics addressed in the following sections.

Ethno-national Identification and Community Organizations

Ethiopian descendants in Australia maintain ties to their country of origin just like other Ethiopians dispersed across the globe (Debela 2012). Churches and mosques have been instrumental in supporting immigrants through the challenges of linguistic and social adjustment. Ethnic stores and shops have also provided a form of social support, as dining at Ethiopian restaurants can relieve people's sense of loss of their homeland.¹⁴ Some of the older organizations, such as The Ethiopian Community Association in Victoria (established in 1984) and the Ethiopian Community Association in South Australia (ECASA, founded in 1992), are non-profit and non-political community organizations that have helped newly arrived Ethiopians to acclimatize to the Australian way of life. They provide some settlement support to new arrivals, as well as support to elders, and organize cultural and sporting activities. They are additionally involved in advocacy on behalf of community members, linking them to various services. Ethnic and civic membership are important elements of diasporic identity (McIntyre and Gamlen 2019), and local organizations may be significant in the development and maintenance of ethnic and diaspora identities and activities. Diaspora organizations can potentially share knowledge, assist local civil society groups in host countries, and support political systems in countries of origin, as well as contributing to national development and policy with the potential to positively or negatively impact peace, security, economic development, and integration. Australia has quite a number of ethnic diasporic organizations and entities that champion specific ethnic identities or espouse an inclusive

14 Known globally for the famine of the 1980s and stereotyped as “starving Africans” it is interesting that Ethiopia’s arguably biggest cultural export globally is its unique cuisine. Ethiopian restaurants in the diaspora feed not only the body but also the soul of the Ethiopian migrant, creating a gathering space filled with the tastes and aromas of the homeland.

pan-Ethiopian agenda.¹⁵ This diversity is particularly remarkable considering the small number of Ethiopians in Australia. Some ethnic organizations have been particularly vocal about the conflict in Tigray (November 2020 to November 2022), organizing marches, fundraising, and lobbying the Australian government.¹⁶

In light of the complicated ethno-national belonging in the homeland, several of the respondents in this study lamented what they classified as a high level of ethnic division within the Ethiopian community in Australia. For instance, Tekle explains:

The question of ethnicity [from the homeland] has a big influence on the diaspora here in Australia. I would say the [Ethiopian] community is very divided. There is a Tigray community. There is an Oromo community. There is no unified Ethiopian community. If you look at the Orthodox churches, there used to be one single Gabriel church. From there, the Amharic speaking people from Gondar and Gojam separated to open their own Giorgis church. They again separated based on who is from Gondar and who is from Gojam. And now more recently because of the conflict, there is a new church by Tigrayan people called Medhaniealem. The one church we knew when I came has now split into four churches. What does all of this show you? It is all very, very bad. There is no unity whatsoever. I can't say anything good about it.

Similarly, Hiwot expands on what she sees as ethnic division in Australia as follows:

There's a lot more in-fighting between Ethiopians, like ethnic divisions (zeregnenet) whether they are Amharic, Afan Oromo, or Tigrigna speakers. There's this tension. It's not well integrated, even to the point where the churches are actually dividing so many times. When we first came in, there was one or two churches that we knew. From that one church, they've divided three times. So, there are three churches that came out of that one

15 A sample of organizations include (listed here in no particular order): Australia Tigray Alliance (ATA); Oromia Support Group Australia; Horn of Africa Communities Network; Australian Oromo Community Association; Harari Community Association Australia Inc.; Ethiopian Community Association in Canberra; Oromian Women's Association Australia (OWAA); JIRRA Permanent Humanitarian Fund for Oromos (JIRRA); and the Alliance of Tigrayan Community Associations in Australia and New Zealand (ATCAN).

16 See Parliament of Australia public Hearing on "Conflict in Ethiopia and its effect on diaspora communities in Australia," March 15, 2022, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/AR1920DFAT/Report/section?id=committees%2Freport%2F024844%2F78450.

church. There is Medhanialem, Mikael, Lideta, Kideste Mariam, Mariam. So, there are about six now, I think. They're really created from one just dividing based on ethnic lines.

In contrast, Dawit emphasized that, despite some of the ethnic in-fighting lamented above, there is still some mutual support through formal and informal organizations such as *idirs*, mutual assistance organizations. He states:

I am part of an Ethiopian and Eritrean *idir* in Queensland. In this organization, we don't talk about politics or religion. It is an organization just like we had back home where we help each other out when there is a death or something else. The *idir* has members from all ethnicities, Oromo, Amhara, whatever. As an Ethiopian community, we are here to support one another. We have about a hundred households as members. We used to be very small. . . . When there is a death in the community, for instance, we come together. We bring food, water, and we mourn with the bereaved. We do this as an Ethiopian community. If we need to fundraise, if the body needs to be sent back to Ethiopia for instance, we donate money. . . . Even if it's not the strongest community, we are here for each other when it matters.

Similarly, Marcos agrees that although it appears that ethnic-based organizations have grown exponentially in Australia in recent years, they are by and large small scale and not well organized. Rather, the larger pan-Ethiopian organizations have been more effective in mobilizing for political and social causes. Recent events that have caused polarization within the Ethiopian diaspora in Australia include the civil conflict in Tigray, the ongoing political crisis in Oromia and the relationship with neighboring Eritrea. It is important to highlight that the respondents in this study come from different ethnic backgrounds including Amharas, Oromos, Tigreans, and Southern nationalities. Regardless of their own ethnic origins, most of the participants in this study highlighted a siloing of the Ethiopian community in Australia based on ethnic lines. Despite these internal divisions, all African migrants in Australia have to deal with the reality of being Black in a white settler society.

Race and Subtle Racism

In a recently published study on racism in Australia, Elias et al. (2021) discuss two diametrically opposed versions of the country: one the one hand, brutal settler colonialism with a blatant history of oppression and racism; contrasted, on the other hand, with the image of a multicultural society, where diversity is celebrated and overt racism is not (officially) tolerated.

The study, the outcome of years of research, underlines not just the historical but also continued marginalization and disenfranchisement of the native population who are often labeled as Black. Australia is a society of “racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva 2006), simultaneously condemning racism and denying its very existence. This forms the complicated background through which to understand race relations in contemporary Australia. Study participants’ assessment of racism and xenophobia targeted towards Black immigrants in Australia range from painting the country as an egalitarian, relatively welcoming place to decrying both subtle and overt forms of othering. As such, respondents in this study oscillated between representing Australia as a welcoming and diverse country and describing it as one that is plagued by both structural and interpersonal racism. To illustrate, Tekle describes how Australia has given him the opportunity to live freely and raise his family in a safe and egalitarian society. He dismisses any evidently discriminatory encounters he has experienced as minor inconveniences and not necessarily race-based, emphasizing that he is an immigrant who does not speak the English language as well as the natives. He sums up his assessment of Australia as “an amazing multicultural country.” Similarly, Hiwot states: “luckily, I had a smooth experience in Australia in general. I’ve heard from people saying I’ve had a racism experience, or something like that, but I haven’t personally experienced it luckily so far.” Although she does not necessarily dismiss the existence of racism, she states she has not personally experienced it. Yacob, a highly skilled migrant, also cannot recall any significant incidents where he experienced racism. He explains:

In the PhD program, I was the only person from Africa. Broadly, the school is diverse, like you have people of color and so on, but I was the only one from Africa. But I don’t feel like I experienced any kind of racism that was in any way overt or perceptible to me. You might notice subtle things where people might be surprised to see you in a certain spot, or something like that, when you’re giving this big lecture, or whatever. So that’s a lot more subtle, but nothing overt. I’ve heard a few friends that have experienced racism in different contexts, but definitely, in an academic context, I didn’t. My transition into life in Australia and in Melbourne specifically, was somewhat quite smooth. Melbourne is, I think, fair to say, very diverse, metropolitan, and so on. I don’t think I have any specific examples and experiences that were negative or kind of made me feel not welcome in any way that I could call out.

Like Hiwot, he is well aware that other Ethiopians and African migrants in Australia do experience racism but his own experience in academia has been more accepting.

At least two respondents warned against attempting to impose an American lens on race relations in Australian contexts. Marcos stated that

“there is no denying the existence of racism and hostility to immigrants, especially against those who are Black and/or Muslim” and that “structural racism is a deeply entrenched, key part of the Australian system as far as the native Australian population is concerned”; but he also noted that “there are many features that are unique to or common in the racism practiced in Australia.” He warns that “many Ethiopians don’t see overt racism against them, individually or as a community.” With such a warning, he also highlights that racism and xenophobia in Australia against Black immigrants is often covert, subtle, and nuanced. Dawit states this more explicitly: “The question of race is not overt in Australia but it’s right there under the surface. They take action against overt racism but it’s very covert. . . . They do not overtly discriminate saying you’re Black or you’re white, but it’s there, you sense it. The issue of skin color comes up.” He provides the example of his daughters’ racially segregated playground interaction to support his point.

The adoptees in the sample are more forceful in their statements regarding racism and xenophobia. Mena lives in Melbourne and works in the gig economy juggling a few precarious jobs. She was adopted when she was three years old by a single, white Australian mother. Her adoptive mother had already adopted another child from Ethiopia who was seven by the time Mena joined the household. She explains:

I went to a school where everyone was Caucasian. I was always the only person who had dark skin in my year level in primary school and in high school. I experienced the first form of racism when I was like five, that I was aware of. Sometimes I became a bit of a token person with dark skin. I would find that people be like “talk black for me” or tell me “You talk so white.” If you’re black, you’re less educated. If I’m talking in a particular way, then they would be like “oh you’re just talking so white,” meaning you’re talking more educated.

She states that she was always treated as exotic, a perpetual outsider. She discusses how her adoptive mother tried to connect her with the Ethiopian community in Melbourne by cultivating friendships among members of the Ethiopian diaspora, frequenting local restaurants and even one of the local churches. She discusses how she has been plagued by questions of belonging since early childhood, leaving the homeland as a very young child, being disconnected from her home culture, separated from her biological family, and raised in a predominantly white environment.

Like Mena, Yordanos is an Ethiopian transnational adoptee, originally from Lalibela, and currently working in fashion while attending graduate school. The oldest of four, she was adopted along with her three siblings and came to Australia aged fourteen, much older than the average adoptee.

She explains that, in her experience, the average Australian has a very limited knowledge of Ethiopia. She explains:

We lived in a small town, just outside of Perth. It's 99 percent Caucasian. . . . Some didn't even know where Ethiopia was. Others had a perception of them as running. The other one is the famine. Everybody knows about the famine, even if that was like thirty to forty years ago. If you say Ethiopia, they will say "oh where is that?" "Oh, running," "Oh, the famine." Majority of the time, you're just a novelty. That's what I felt like. Their understanding was quite . . . tiring.

Yordanos' assessment of Australian perceptions of Ethiopia and the discourse of othering based on national origin echoes Woldeyes's writing, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. She further explains the indirect and subtle form of racism that is prevalent in Australian society:

Racism in Australia is indirect. It is never straight to your face. It will be "oh, we're just joking. No big deal. We're just joking." So, you can't actually address it. That's one of the most frustrating parts is that they will always say "oh we're just joking mate, just brush it off." It's just something that was "oh, don't make a big deal out of it. Chill" that kind of vibe. . . . So yes, it's always indirect. It's very hard to address it.

While most of the participants with a refugee background talked about Australia as a welcoming and multicultural country, Lenssa's experience of overt racism stands in contrast, more in line with the adoptees' experiences. Lenssa first migrated to Australia at the age of sixteen together with her family after a year in transit in Kenya. Her experiences integrating into Australian society as a teenager were rough, filled with encounters of racism and xenophobia. She recalls:

Oh, I've encountered so much, so much racism. People say Australia is a multicultural country. Yes, it is, but there's also quite a lot of racism. There's a lot of discrimination. I struggled really badly throughout my high school life here, especially grade ten and eleven. Sometimes the kids would laugh at you if you cannot fully express yourself. Kids would bully you because we are from a non-English speaking background and we're not as fluent as them. They make you lose your confidence. It just makes you feel like you just do not belong there. You feel like there is something wrong. I used to say to myself "why am I even here?" I was saying to my parents, "send me back home. "I just wanted to go back. It was a very tough experience. . . . Overcoming all of that, especially mentally, you have to be strong. You have to be a strong person. It was hard. High school was very hard. . . . The kids would ask you where you are from. The majority of them have no idea what or where Ethiopia is. When you actually explain to them that it's in Africa, east Africa, some of them will say to you "oh do

you guys even have a house back there or food to eat?" . . . They would treat us so badly. They would make us feel so low about ourselves, like we came escaping a famine or something. The way they view immigrants . . . Yes, racism exists in this country.

Lenssa explains that the racism and discrimination that she has experienced in Australia continued past high school and sometimes plagues her in her career as a nurse. For example, she recalls one incident where the mother of a patient asked for the nurse manager: "When they called me in, I went in and said hi, my name is blah-blah, what can I do for you? She said, 'are you the nurse manager?' She was very surprised. She asked if we have a white nurse. She was showing me her skin color and said, 'white like me.' That was a very blunt, direct racism to me." Lenssa explains that she took the case to her supervisors and brought a legal complaint against the patient and the hospital supported her and acted on her behalf. She was happy that such processes and procedures are in place to protect her rights and that, legally, racism is not tolerated in the workplace.

Regardless of the legal protection, she recalls several other incidents where white patients did not want to be touched or taken care of by her or other Black nurses. She describes one incident as follows:

One patient, she would call for the manager. She didn't want to be looked after by a Black person and she just said it upfront. She said, "I want my own." Some of them will tell you "Go back to where you came from." I don't entertain such comments. When she said "go back to where you came from" I told her "The land does not belong to you. You are also an immigrant. This is the land of the aboriginal Australians and they're Black." When she said, "go back to where you came from" I told her to also pack her bags "you also need to go back to where you came from." So, I would tell her "this is not your land. You are also an immigrant. You just got here before I did."

In this exchange, Lenssa links up her racial identity with that of Native Australians, emphasizing that the land originally belonged to them and that white European descendants can claim no moral high ground. Moreover, Lenssa emphasizes the importance of speaking out against racism. She considers other Ethiopians' responses to racism as "shoving it under the rug" or "turning a blind eye" while she explains her own position as follows: "It depends on your personality. I'm not the type of person who would sit down and take on all this abuse. I would never hold back. I would always speak up. You have to fight." While speaking out may be important, as stated above, constantly dealing with racial encounters can have long-lasting psychological effects on the individual and can lead to "racial battle fatigue" (Gatwiri 2021).

Going beyond personal experience to discussing the state of Ethiopians or more generally Africans in Australia, the participants agreed that there is a level of racial discrimination that other groups do not face. For instance, when I probed them on the question of labels, particularly the use of the term “African-Australian,” Hiwot states that it is often presented in a negative sense on the news media as an (indirect) form of othering. She states: “When any kind of criminal act happens, or anything that is not good that happens, it’s either Sudanese or anyone that’s of African background, it gets highlighted a bit more in the news. The same kind of criminal act happens with Australian white people, and it doesn’t get highlighted as much. The minute it says a Black person did this, it’s a bit more investigated.” Building on this narrative, Lenssa states:

One of the things I have noticed with the police here is that when they apprehend a white person or one of us [a Black person], they get very aggressive with us. You can see the hate straight away. When the youth are interviewed, they talk openly about the aggression from the police, they feel targeted, criminalized for not doing anything. Even when there is a crime that has been committed, the exact type of crime is reported differently when it’s a Black versus white offender. Even though they say the police don’t discriminate, there’s plenty of discrimination. In the reporting, they highlight that the offender is Black. They don’t do that when it’s a white offender. It is not necessarily the crime itself, but the fact that it was committed by a Black person.

What Lenssa is highlighting here is how white privilege allows for race not to be factored in when discussing criminal acts perpetrated by white people.

Marcos, while adamant that the type of institutionalized racism that is rampant in other parts of the West does not seem to exist vis-à-vis immigrants in Australia, he admits that “(white) Australian opinion is hardening. This is part of a global phenomenon that attended the upsurge of right-wing, anti-immigrant populism.” He explains that this opinion gains fertile ground in times of a right-wing government taking control of government or the economy experiencing a crisis. Marcos links the presence and growth of right-wing media with some of the negative representation of Africans in Australia.

Yacob seems to agree:

You kind of have these more right-wing politicians, and certain types of media outlets that are slightly more right-wing. You can sort of know what to expect from these types of folks. At some point there were a couple of right-wing politicians that tried to make a significant deal out of a few Sudanese groups of boys that did a few criminal acts. They kind of wanted to frame that as African gangs are kind of taking over Melbourne and so

on. That was propagated through the right-wing media to kind of create a scare campaign, and a sense of othering of this population. Fortunately, that didn't have as much traction. There was a period of time where that was the thing. But there's a decent center and left in this country as well, that has an equal voice to kind of offset that narrative and kind of create a balance and kind of shed light on how biased and inaccurate that kind of reporting is. Things like that help. Like most countries, the more conservative right wing wants to create this anti-immigration sentiment. They have a certain sense of what this country ought to look like. The general, I think prevailing sentiment is a bit more center or center-left, if you will.

Lenssa perfectly sums up the "perpetual strangerhood" that some migrants feel in the host country:

At this point in my life, I lived most of my life in Australia, compared to how long I've lived in Ethiopia. We came here as kids. However, you feel like you're still a stranger. That sense of belonging is just not there. It's a good country to work, to study, you live just like any other Australian. But as an immigrant, especially as a Black immigrant, there's a lot that you go through. I don't think it matters whether you were born in this country or came here very young, none of those matters. What matters is your skin color. The fact that you're black is what they care about. You're Black. Full stop. They don't care whether you're an Australian citizen. Some of them ask "Are you a permanent resident here?" And when you say "No, I'm actually a citizen," for them, that's very hard to swallow. As a Black person, they try to demoralize you from claiming an Australian identity. They steal your confidence. They say demoralizing things to you. Just because you've got dark skin, they abuse you. You don't fully get this sense of belonging here in Australia. You're Black. Full stop. You don't belong.

Although this lack of belonging is not expressed by all the participants in this study, it highlights the fact that legal belonging does not always or automatically translate as sociocultural or political belonging.

Conclusion

This empirical paper provides a snapshot of the Ethiopian community in Australia at a point in time. Ethiopian migrants in this region of the world are just establishing themselves and are mostly still first-generation migrants. There are some Ethiopian-Australians who have achieved some measure of success and recognition from the larger Australian community, such as Tsehay Hawkins (introduced earlier) and Dr. Berhan Ahmed, who received the Victoria State Australian of the Year award in 2009 for his work and

advocacy for the African-Australian community.¹⁷ In general, the Ethiopian-Australian experience is marked by non-linear mobility, as most have experienced long transit periods in neighboring East African countries before arriving in Australia. Upon arrival in Australia, there is an expectation that settlement will be smooth and uncomplicated. While the Australian government provides assistance to refugees or those who arrive on humanitarian visas, the settlement process is by no means uncomplicated. Ethiopians in Australia face two challenging realities upon settling in their new country. The first of these challenges is the ethnic division of the Ethiopian community as many of the participants in this study lamented. The ethnic fracture of the homeland is not only replicated but sometimes amplified in the diaspora. The second reality is one pertaining to race and racism. While some participants perceived Australia as a welcoming and diverse multicultural society, others experienced xenophobia, subtle and overt racism, and various forms of othering. As immigrant racial identities are shaped in relation to the prevailing national and global politics, Ethiopians in Australia are subsumed under the emergent “African-Australian” identity, conflating all African immigrants’ social identity under one label. As Ethiopians in Australia are an under-studied group, this chapter fills an important gap in our understanding and mapping of the global Ethiopian diaspora. It is the hope of this author that other researchers take up the mantle and delve deeper into quantitatively and qualitatively surveying Ethiopian migrants in different geographies through Australia and New Zealand to expand our understanding of how geography (and ensuing sociocultural, political, and economic layout) affects the settlement and integration of this group.

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Chapter 7

Ethiopian Irregular Migrants to Germany

Trajectory of Voyages and the Reality Gap in Expectations

Fitsum R. Teddla and Tesfaye Semela

Introduction

According to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published in 2018, more than 244 million people across the world live in countries other than their country of birth; indeed, by the end of 2016, over 22.5 million people were refugees (IOM 2018). The same IOM report indicates that 16 million Africans live in other African countries, with another 16 million living outside of the continent altogether. Nonetheless, in recent years migration from sub-Saharan Africa has attracted increasing attention from scholars and European and African policymakers alike, focusing on the flow of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

The international migration of Ethiopians is not a recent phenomenon at all. But Ethiopian mass migration has become more prevalent in recent decades. The complex political and security situation in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution and the protracted conflict that followed (domestically and internationally) serve as a critical juncture in Ethiopian migration (Semela and Cochrane 2019). At this time, political dissidents and the intelligentsia sought opportunities and took refuge elsewhere, while ordinary people who opposed the Derg military regime (1974–91) fled persecution and reprisal. In the later stages of the Derg regime, new insecurities emerged (both physical and political), resulting in waves of migration in the late 1980s and early

1990s, including after that regime had been toppled (Estifanos n.d.). The past two decades have witnessed a growing stream of people moving from the countries in the Horn of Africa—especially Ethiopia—through Sudan and Libya or other alternative routes, and into Europe. Even though a huge number of lives are lost along the way, migrants are still determined “to try their chances” in the face of very real, existential threats.

The literature on migration largely focuses on discovering why migrants originating from developing countries want to travel to developed nations. Reasons include structural differences in labor, income, capital, and more between regions and rational decision-making, whereby individuals decide to move to regions with less intense labor and high wages (Arango 2000, 285; Jennissen 2007, 413). On the one hand, this individual decision-making can be seen on a household level, that is, as a means of diversifying risk (Massey et al. 1993, 439; while, on the other hand, the concept of migration networks might give us a more universal picture, whereby networks themselves spread and fuel further migration (ibid., 448). Carling (2002) and de Haas (2014) explain the motors of migration in purely individual terms. In de Haas’s words: “we can only expect people to migrate if they have both the aspirations and capabilities to do so” (2014, 28).

Yet, research to date has not adequately addressed why aspiring and capable migrants are ready to encounter certain and foreseeable danger to realize their aspiration to migrate, which is of particular concern when studying the motivations and movements of migrants originating from the Horn of Africa. This chapter, therefore, studies Ethiopian migrants who encountered real and foreseeable danger to reach destinations in Europe. We have decided to focus on Ethiopians who crossed the Sahara Desert via war-torn Libya to reach Germany, following yet another deadly voyage on the high waters of the Mediterranean Sea. In so doing, we seek to answer two questions. First of all, how do migrants consider *foreseeable dangers* in their risk calculation before embarking on realizing their aspiration? And, secondly, how do Ethiopian migrants evaluate the fulfilment of their aspirations in Europe? In answering these two questions, this chapter examines the applicability of Carling’s (2002) aspiration/ability model for understanding the motivations underlying migration from Ethiopia to Europe.

Theoretical Perspectives on Migration

There are a number of theories that attempt to explain why individuals decide to migrate. Some of these theories attribute the reasons to micro-level factors, while others emphasize macro-level, structural dynamics; some theoretical models, however, combine aspects from both micro- and macro-level

approaches. Neoclassical economic theory, for example, explains migration in terms of macro-level structural determinants and micro-level individual decision-making. According to this view, migration behaviors are determined by differences in labor, capital, wages, and other factors between regions and countries. Due to such differences, labor migrants move from regions and countries that have surplus labor and low wages to regions and countries experiencing labor scarcities and offering higher wages. At the micro level, individuals respond to such structural, macro-level differences by making a rational decision to migrate. Neoclassical economics therefore views migrants to be rational actors who calculate the costs and benefits of migration and act accordingly (Jennissen 2007, 413; Arango 2000, 285). Arango (2000, 286), however, identifies two major shortcomings of this neoclassical economic theory. The first is that, counter to its own inherent assumptions, neoclassical economics fails to explain why few people migrate and many prefer to stay; and the second is that this approach does not account for why some countries have higher outmigration than others.

Another theory of migration makes use of the concept of migration networks. These are defined as “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (Massey et al. 1993, 448). Networks sustain migration not only by rendering support structures for the flow of information, financing, accommodation, employment, and more; they also provide alternative routes that bypass restrictive migration structures and barriers. Massey et al. argue that “once the number of migrants reaches a critical threshold, the expansion of networks reduces the costs and risks of movement, which causes the probability of migration to rise, which causes additional movement, which further expands the networks and so on” (1993, 448–49). The central idea behind this assertion—and others like it—is that the probability of people migrating is high if potential migrants have ties with people who have already migrated. This seems too narrow, as only those who have access to networks are understood as having the opportunity to migrate. Moreover, counter to this assumption, it is clear that migration networks themselves warn potential migrants from embarking on deadly and risky journeys; yet, in spite of such warnings, potential migrants do not trust stories of risks including death and rape.

Flahaux and de Haas (2016, 23) understand migration from Africa in relation to processes of development and social transformation in the continent. They argue that development and social transformation in Africa enhance the aspiration and capability to migrate, thus refuting the conventional understanding of migration, whereby poverty, conflict, underdevelopment, and other causal factors drive African migration. De Haas (2014) argues that considering development not only explains the decision to migrate or to

stay but also helps us to identify social change and transformation as factors underlying aspiration and ability.

According to Carling, who introduced the aspiration/ability model to explain migration and human mobility worldwide, “migration involves, first, a *wish* to migrate, and second, the *realization* of this wish” (2002, 2, emphasis in original). Carling goes on to argue that aspiration and ability explain a number of aspects of contemporary migration and non-migration that have not been accounted for by traditional theories. Carling conceptualizes “aspiration” as a belief that migration is preferable to non-migration. The aspiration to migrate can vary in degree and in the balance between choice and coercion. Among those who aspire to migrate, according to Carling, “some will also have the ability to do so. These people are the *migrants*, whose international movements can be observed. Those who have the aspirations to migrate but lack the ability are *involuntary non-migrants*. They differ from the *voluntary non-migrants*, who stay because of a belief that non-migration is preferable to migration” (2002, 9, emphasis in original).

Furthermore, the aspiration/ability model posits that the aspiration to migrate should be analyzed at both macro and micro (i.e., understanding individual characteristics) levels. At the macro level, the aspiration to migrate is affected (i.e., encouraged or discouraged) by the “emigration environment” which applies to all community members such as the social, economic, and political context. At the micro level, the aspiration to migrate is constrained or facilitated by individual’s age, gender, family migration history, level of education, and the like. Similarly, the *ability* to realize migration should be analyzed at both structural and individual levels. At the macro level, local and international policies and practices could positively or negatively affect the ability to migrate. Carling attributes this to what he calls the macro-level “*immigration interface*,” which “encompasses all the available modes of migration, with associated requirements, costs, and risks. These are primarily the direct or indirect results of restrictive immigration policies” (2002, 10, emphasis in original). De Haas (2014, 29) adds that people are forced to stay if they are deprived of the ability to exercise their negative or positive freedoms to realize their aspiration. By negative freedoms, de Haas refers to the absence of barriers and constraints, whereas positive freedoms refer to the ability to take control of one’s life and to realize one’s fundamental purposes.

To put it in context, although the aspiration/ability model explains why people choose either to migrate or to stay, the motivation of an aspiring and capable migrant to face foreseeable dangers, including death and rape, in the realization of that aspiration remains obscure. On the one hand, the model assumes a sufficiency of aspiration and ability to realize the wish to migrate. On the other hand, it posits “immigration barriers” (Carling 2002) or the

“deprivation of negative and positive freedoms” (de Haas 2014) as barriers to migration. Yet, our empirical study shows that those migrants who are informed about foreseeable dangers decide to realize their aspiration and embark on risky journeys. Given this gap in the theory, here we explore how migrants consider foreseeable dangers in their calculation of migration risks.

In this chapter, we contextualize migration and migrants within the aspiration/capability model as defined by Carling (2002) and de Haas (2014). We therefore employ the term “migrant” to refer to a person who aspired to move and subsequently realized their wish to migrate. Hence, migrants are people who decide to move “to change their life circumstances and to escape from disadvantaged positions” (de Haas 2014, 26). Accordingly, we specifically use the term migration and migrant instead of other terminologies such as legal/illegal, regular/irregular migrants, asylum seeker, etc., none of which is appropriate in explaining the dynamics of contemporary migration.

Research Context and Methodology

Both existing studies (e.g., Kifale and Mohammed 2015; Semela and Cochran 2019) and the actual observation of migration trends suggest that Ethiopian migrants leave the country in different directions for various reasons. Widely known routes include: the route through Moyale into Kenya and on to South Africa; crossing the border to Djibouti and Somalia to cross the Red Sea to travel on to Yemen and, finally, Saudi Arabia; and crossing to Sudan through the towns of Metema and Humera. Migrants cross borders by car or on foot. The journey is mostly facilitated by dealers and human traffickers who are active in their respective areas. Likewise, migrants also travel by air to Gulf countries, Turkey, Greece, and to few eastern European countries. We can also include those who travel by air to mainland Europe specially through “soft” countries like Italy. The choice of which route to take can be attributed to the capabilities of migrants and their access to information and traffickers.

It is worth noting, too, that when we are talking about Ethiopian migrants in Germany, we are also talking about the wider context of migrants who have arrived using a variety of routes. Our observations in the town of Giessen, where the migrant reception center for the state of Hessen is located, confirm that migrants pass through all of the routes mentioned above. We can therefore deduce that not all migrants originally aspired to come to Germany or Europe. Likewise, depending on the circumstances, migrants might decide to change their last destination country even after arriving in Germany.

What is more, each route entails unique characteristics, trajectories, and life experiences. Arab countries are mostly destination countries. However, migrants later develop the aspiration to migrate to Europe. Migrants enter Gulf Arab countries as migrant workers under the *Kafala* system.¹ By contrast, Turkey is both a destination and a transit country. Some migrants travel by air as workers, while others use Turkey to cross into Greece and later into mainland Europe. Comparatively, while some already experienced the disadvantages of the *Kafala* system, which effectively places them under the control of their sponsors, those few who come to eastern European countries as contract workers experience relative freedom. The most exceptional case is Sudan, where a majority of migrants travel by car and on foot. Hence, unlike the *Kafala* system and the status of contract workers, Ethiopian migrants who have settled in Sudan experience other forms of uncertainty in their lives.

Given this wider context of Ethiopian migrants, we specifically focus on those who have taken the route through Sudan, the Sahara Desert, Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea to arrive in Germany. As they are part and parcel of the wider mass mobility of Ethiopians internationally, migrants taking this increasingly challenging route share common aspirations with their compatriots even though they might differ in terms of capability and life experiences. Factors like individual capability, social networks, and access to information, dealers, and traffickers determine the decision to take this route. Besides, some migrants who have already tried other routes, returnee migrants, deportees from Arab countries, and others take this route as a last resort.

The present study employs a qualitative approach. Data were generated using in-depth interviews of twenty key informants, including seven female and thirteen males, currently living in Hessen, Germany, who underwent the experiences of migration from Ethiopia to Germany through the Sahara-Libya-Mediterranean Sea route. Six of them were between the ages of 26 and 30, eight between 31 and 35, two between 36 and 40, one between 41 and 45, and three between 46 and 50 years old. Among them, eleven were migrants who originally intended to go to Sudan and later developed the aspiration to travel on to Europe; and nine were transit migrants who originally intended to go to Europe. They left Ethiopia during the period extending between 2005 and 2015 and arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2017. Only nine of them have residence permits, while the remaining

1 *Kafala* is sponsorship system adopted in Middle Eastern Arab countries to govern migrant workers and their residence. Government agencies manage migrants through sponsors who have full control over the migrants' status in the country, meaning that migrants cannot even change jobs without permission from their sponsors.

had their asylum applications rejected, i.e., they were not permitted to work or indefinitely live in Germany—they are only “tolerated” to stay in the country temporarily.² We employed biographical interviews to generate the required data and used narrative analysis to interpret them.

Findings

From the analysis of biographical interviews with our key respondents, we have identified four major themes: migration experiences, mainly in Sudan, that contribute towards developing the aspiration to migrate to Europe; the influence of transit migrants to Europe on migrants who originally intended to stay in Sudan; the ways in which migrants consider foreseeable dangers in their decision to migrate; and, finally, assessment of the fulfillment of aspirations after arriving in Germany, and Europe at large. In the paragraphs that follow, we interrogate the existing theoretical explanations, especially the aspiration/ability model in explaining the reasons behind decisions made to migrate in the face of deadly voyage to the “promised land.”

Context of Ethiopian Destination and Transit Migrants in Sudan

In order to make it easier to discern aspiration and ability as well as recognize how aspiration evolves through time, we identify two types of Ethiopian migrants in Sudan: transit and destination. With these terms, we define and identify the unique features and trajectories of migration. Destination migrants in Sudan originally aspired to migrate to Sudan but over time, due to new social constructs associated with mass movement of transit migrants to Europe, develop the aspiration to migrate in the direction in which transit migrants move. Examination of the relationships between these two types of Ethiopian migrants in Sudan adds new insights to the aspiration/ability model, illuminating how individuals decide to migrate. Furthermore, our study helps to explain not only the influence of transit migrants on destination migrants’ decision to migrate to Europe, but also how both types of

2 A “tolerated” stay permit refers to “Duldung” in German. It means the asylum case is rejected and the applicant is obliged to leave the country. They are neither permitted to work nor indefinitely stay in the country. Due to various factors, however, neither their departure nor deportation is not possible. For that reason, they are tolerated on a temporary basis, surviving on the social assistances provided by the relevant government agency.

migrants develop and redefine their aspirations that have resulted in changing destination countries within Europe.

Transit migrants arrive in Sudan for only short period of time with the purpose of arranging their travel to Europe. Destination migrants, on the other hand, come to Sudan to realize their aspirations in Sudan. Although destination migrants in Sudan build financial and social networks, along with other capabilities, uncertainties in their life circumstances and the success of transit migrants with regard to arriving in Europe easily initiate their aspiration to join in the mass migration north. Hence, for the purpose of our study, we consider Sudan as both destination and transit country when studying the complexities of migration from Ethiopia to Europe.

Destination Migrants

In this section, we will explore the initial aspirations and life experiences of destination migrants in Sudan as well as how new aspirations emerge, resulting in onward migration to Europe. Our study confirms that the majority of Ethiopian destination migrants in Sudan are motivated by economic reasons. In particular, migrants from rural areas of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray as well as those who originated from small and medium towns of the same regions predominantly galvanized by high hopes of improved economic conditions in Sudan. We discovered that such migrants mostly originate from places like Jimma, Arsi, Bale, and towns between Mojo in Oromia and Hawassa in the Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples Region, from Northwestern areas of the Amhara Region, from Tigray, and from Addis Ababa. However, this does not mean that migrants do not come from other parts of the country. But the number of migrants from these areas is much higher relative to other parts of the country. For the most part, male migrants tend to be self-employed in the informal sectors. The number of schools drop-out and recent high school graduates is higher than from others areas. Women migrants, however, were predominantly unemployed.

Although life in Sudan is full of uncertainties, the accounts of migrants agree that job opportunities there are better than in Ethiopia. The uncertainties of life in Sudan can nevertheless be attributed to a lack of residence permit and increased opportunities of unofficial employment. Migrants rarely demand a contract from their employer, largely due to a lack of awareness of such things on their part, or a lack of residence and work permit. Most of the migrants we interviewed were not aware that they needed to obtain residency and work permits, nor were they aware of the processes involved in doing so, with the result that they neither registered in refugee camps nor looked for residence permits. Those who knew about the UNHCR refugee camps preferred not to register due to the difficulties of living in the camps and, once there, getting out of them.

Khartoum is a destination city for most of Ethiopian destination migrants. Newly arriving migrants go directly to Khartoum and later move to other parts of Sudan in search of employment. In few cases, there are some migrants who find job opportunities inside Sudan even before they arrive in Khartoum. Then again, not all migrants have basic geographical knowledge about Sudan even though it is their destination country. For instance, we found that some young migrants from Oromia wanted to go to Sudan but did not know that Sudan shares a border with Ethiopia. Due to their lack of orientation, they were caught by surprise when they crossed the border and arrived in Sudan after traveling for only a few days. Case A, from Bale (in the Oromia region) said: "I was surprised when we were told that we were already in Sudan and I saw a vast area after crossing the [Ethiopian] border and travelling some hours inside Sudan. First, my expectation was big cities, buildings, and industries; secondly, I expected long travel that can take many days."

Upon arrival, human traffickers transfer the newcomers to "a safe house" where they host migrants. They provide migrants with a telephone so that they would be able to contact their parents, close relatives, or a trusted person with whom they left money to pay for their journey. The majority of our respondents confirmed that they would not be allowed to leave the "safe house" unless they fully paid the agreed amount. Failure to do so would result in being a hostage until they had paid the money "owed" to their traffickers. Those who were able to pay the full amount were allowed to use their social networks to communicate with friends, relatives, or fellow country men or women who had already started living in Sudan. Those who do not know anyone often go to places where they think they can find fellow Ethiopians, especially people from their region, hometown, or locality. Such new arrivals may join those who have contacts to stay for a few days. If not, human traffickers give them information about where they can find fellow countrymen.

Most new arrivals face shocking experiences from the outset. Normally, migrants rent a house in a group and share costs. Some destination migrants rent a house in order to sublet it to those who are in need and therefore make a profit. According to the study participants, their shocking experiences started when they saw up to seventy Ethiopians living in a single house. Those houses are used to "spend a night and when they are not working." Women use them once or twice a month, because the kind of work they undertake often does not allow them to take up permanent residence in a single place. Women tend to work as cleaners, housemaids, as waitresses in shisha cafes, roadside cafes, and normal cafeterias, and in beauty salons. As beauty salons require skill and experience, few women get the opportunity to work in this area. Men are mostly employed in farms cultivating foodstuffs

such as tomatoes, sesame, and sorghum, in industries making textiles, soap, ice, processing food, and more, as laborers on construction sites, as drivers of three-wheeled taxis (locally known as “Rasha”), and in restaurants, barber shops, and shisha cafés. According to the accounts of our respondents, between 2011 and 20014/15 a migrant worker could earn on average between 300 and 600 Sudanese Pounds (US\$ 52.71—105.41) per month.³ Those who work in barber shops could earn over 1,000 Sudanese Pounds (US\$ 175.69). Migrants can also open cafés, shisha cafés, and barber shops or own a Rasha taxi. In such cases, income could double or triple. Many of the migrants we interviewed had their own businesses. Women, in particular, owned shisha and coffee shops.

The capabilities of destination migrants in Sudan are determined by strength of social networks, possession of skills, and the duration of their stay. While strong networks enhance one’s capability to find employment, information, and better shelter, skills provide wider job opportunities. Likewise, the duration of a migrant’s stay increases one’s familiarity with the society, culture, language, and life circumstances of the host country. Migrants who stay for longer develop greater linguistic and financial capabilities as well as strong social networks, job opportunities, and information. Networks in turn provide smooth flow of information and updates, regardless of quality, on changing life circumstances and opportunities. In contrast, those who lack strong social network and new arrivals lack such important factors of capabilities. For example, those who have skills like carpentry, construction, masonry, auto mechanics, or beauty and styling have greater opportunities than those who lack such skills. A combination of longer duration, familiarity with life conditions, skills, strong social networks, and diversification of income sources enhances one’s success rate, too.

Case B stated: “I decided to go to Sudan when my childhood friend returned from Sudan for vacation and told me about his success in Sudan.” As Case B’s testimony shows, destination migrants learn about opportunities in Sudan from sources including friends, return migrants, and social media. Short-term return migrants in particular greatly and easily influence potential migrants as the changes in their life, the support they provide to their families and relatives, and the information they disseminate are visible in their community. Direct contacts and social media like Facebook and WhatsApp are significant, and those who use social media have the tendency to spontaneously decide to migrate.

3 USD = 5.691857 SDG, as of 15.06.2014, source: <https://fxtop.com> historical money converter.

Transit migrants to Europe

We differentiate Ethiopian transit migrants from destination migrants in Sudan by their temporality, aspiration/capability, and movement. Unlike destination migrants, transit migrants aspire to directly travel to Europe without staying in Sudan. They have no intention to return to Ethiopia or to settle in Sudan. The duration of their stay in Sudan depends on their aspiration/capability, or the organizational efficiency of the human traffickers and the conditions of travel, such as weather in the Mediterranean Sea and war in Libya. If the combination of these factors is positive, duration of stay in Sudan may be just few days. For instance, Case C said: "I left Sudan after four days staying in Khartoum. I finalized my deal in Ethiopia, and when I arrived in Sudan, I joined a group that was ready to leave for Europe." Those with financial capability, however, were able to stay longer until they raise the amount of money required, either by working in Sudan or from friends and relatives.

As both transit and destination migrants originate from the same emigration environment, they share the same macro-level migration environment in developing aspiration. Transit migrants develop their original aspiration to migrate to Europe based on the information they acquire from friends, return migrants, family and relatives, the community, and social media and networks. Facebook in particular is a vital sources of information and communication, as it allows migrants to share pictures and information both quickly and frequently. The pictures that potential migrants see of a person they know who left months or years ago might trigger a spontaneous decision. What is important here is that the information transit migrants have and the aspiration they develop is to go to Europe. Their knowledge about Sudan is just as a transit country, and often they are only in Sudan because it is the route chosen by the human traffickers who organized the journey.

Our findings suggest that three types of transit migrants exist whose duration of stay in transit (in this case, in Sudan) strongly correlates with their financial capacity. The first category is those who are capable of financing their journey to Europe. This in turn can be further divided into two, namely: (a) those who can finance and have already finalized their deal for the journey from Ethiopia to Europe with human traffickers; and (b) those who have organized their trip to Sudan by themselves or arrived in Sudan with the assistance of traffickers and need to connect with human traffickers to move to Europe. Like Case C, those who can finance and finalized their deal may stay in Sudan for a few days until the traffickers organize the necessary logistics, while the others may stay for few more weeks or even months until they find the right human trafficker. If the deal covers the trip to Europe, human traffickers assume responsibility for organizing logistics and accommodation for migrants during their stay in Sudan. By contrast,

if the deal does not cover the journey beyond Sudan, migrants themselves need to look for human traffickers and arrange a place to stay mostly with the support of destination migrants. The second type of transit migrants are those who stay in Sudan for the purpose of raising the required amount of money from their families, relatives, and friends. A third group are those migrants who arrive in Sudan but need to work until they save the amount of money required. Case D, for example, said: “before I started my journey, I stayed in Sudan for two years to save money. I worked in the construction sector which is my profession and earned a good amount of cash to cover the costs of my travel to Europe.” Transit migrants of this sort need to look for a job and a place to stay before they can realize their dreams of entering Europe.

Influence of transit migrants on destination migrants in Sudan

Like any other social group whose members share similar experiences and concerns, it is no surprise that transit migrants and destination migrants mutually influence each other in the process of social interaction. In this study, despite the existence of mutual influence, our findings highlight the strong influence of transit on destination migrants. Influence of transit migrants in Sudan on destination migrants can be understood within the context of length of stay of the former in Sudan and their successful entry into Libya and Europe. Destination migrants in Sudan are always caught between choosing to return, settle, or further migrate to another countries. The decision to return and settle respectively depends on the level of certainty of life conditions back home and in Sudan, while the aspiration to migrate to further countries depends not only on the level of new opportunities and the certainty of settling in Europe but also on the success of transit migrants. For example, four out of the eleven destination migrants we interviewed said that they returned to Ethiopia, but due to life uncertainties they decided to return again to Sudan. All in all, migrants weigh their real uncertain life experiences—whether they are in Sudan or back home—against imagined opportunities in Europe. They take the mass movement of transit migrants and success of their arrival in Europe for granted.

All things considered, Ethiopian destination migrants in Sudan are influenced by the movement of migrants from Eritrea and Somalia too. Ethiopia and Sudan are transit countries for migrants from Eritrea and Somalia. Like Ethiopian transit migrants, they stay in Sudan to organize their journey and to raise funds. Hence, Ethiopian transit migrants are not the only sources of information for Ethiopian destination migrants in Sudan.

Two other important factors contribute to the influence of transit migrants on destination migrants. Firstly, destination migrants in Sudan serve as a safe corridor through which to transit migrants, as they host and provide services

to each other; and, secondly, over time some destination migrants establish relationships and become part of larger migration networks stretching from Ethiopia to Europe. Active and creative destination migrants emerge as key players in the migration networks in disseminating information and becoming contact persons for dealers, traffickers, and migrants who have already arrived in Europe. In turn, migration networks produce and reproduce key persons, service providers, dealers, and traffickers from the migrants themselves. As demand increases and the market develops, the power and influence of such personalities increase too.

Dangers in the Sahara Desert, War in Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea

With this in mind, we now turn back to the focal point of our study: the way migrants consider foreseeable dangers in their decision to migrate. They travel with people and in environments and conditions that they have never experienced before. Their journey is organized, coordinated, and led by human traffickers. Migrants have no control over their life or the conditions of travel. Most migrants explain their treatment at the hands of drivers/traffickers⁴ in the Sahara Desert as harsh, dangerous, and merciless, and many feel terrorized and frightened from the moment they start their journey. Figure 7.1 depicts the migration routes our interviewees mentioned most frequently. In the first route, migrants travel from Khartoum to Sudan's border with Libya where Sudanese drivers hand them over to Libyan drivers, then the Libyans drive to the town of Ajdabiya, from there to Benghazi, and from Benghazi to Tripoli. In the second, migrants travel from Khartoum to Sudan's border with Chad, where Sudanese drivers hand migrants over to Chadian drivers, who then transfer them to Libyan drivers at Chad's border with Libya. The Libyans drive to the town of Ajdabiya, then drive to the city of Benghazi, and finally from Benghazi to Tripoli. The third route starts at the Libyan border to the town of Sabha, and then to Tripoli. Human traffickers determine the choice of routes depending on the conditions on the routes. In order to buy some time to find secure smugglers to cross the

4 The terms "human traffickers" and "drivers" can be used interchangeably. Migrants cannot exactly differentiate between the two. Some talk of "drivers" while others speak of "human traffickers." Most migrants make agreements with dealers who communicate with the main human traffickers. Migrants know the main human traffickers only by name or they may see them when they are collected in Tripoli. Migrants may also meet traffickers and middlemen in different places, which they commonly call the *Mezra*, where traffickers collect migrants.



Figure 7.1. Migration routes from Ethiopia to Germany. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Omdurman,+Sudan/@17.432801,-5.1840243,3z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x168e8bf303b5ade3:0xffa2d3531b1ae48f!8m2!3d15.6475782!4d32.4806894>.

Mediterranean Sea, most migrants prefer to go to Benghazi. Those migrants who finalized their deal from Sudan or Ethiopia to Europe directly drive to Tripoli.

Death, rape, torture, being taken hostage, forced labor,⁵ being sold into slavery, hunger, and thirst are common dangers migrants face in these routes. Our interviewees confirm that they saw corpses along the way and had to bury the bodies of their fellow travelers. Case E said: “I have buried more than twenty people, including two of my close friends.” Case F reported: “in the middle of the Sahara Desert in Chad we met about 250 migrants in one *Mezra*, mostly Somalis. They told us they were demanded to pay money which the majority of them could not pay in time. Some of them were in this *Mezra* for more than six months. I have seen three graveyards around this place.” People die when circumstances force them to stay longer than planned or expected in the desert for different reasons such as war, waiting

5 According to the accounts of our informants not all labor was forced labor. Traffickers sometimes provided job opportunities to those who did not have the money to pay. The job could be in the compound, commonly called the *Mezra*, where they collect migrants for the next stage in their journey, or outside the *Mezra*. Migrants work until they have accrued the required amount of money to pay for the previous trip or the next one.

to be transferred to the next traffickers, change of route, and others. Despite these ups and downs in the Sahara as well as the harsh conditions they experience in Libya, the number of migrants arriving in Italy and the number of those who died or went missing in the Mediterranean Sea between 2014 and 2019 is far too high (see Table 7.1).

Rape, torture, hard labor, and hunger are also common in *Mezras*, where smugglers collect migrants in the desert and the cities of Tripoli, Benghazi, Ajdabiya, and on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Our respondents told different stories concerning rape, torture, hunger, and hygiene. In some cases, migrants were captured and sold to smugglers. Three of our interviewees were captured in the city of Ajdabiya and taken to the *Mezra* in the same city. Interestingly, three of them refer to the same person who captured them at different times. Case F reports: “together with my nine friends we were captured while looking for job in Benghazi. We were freed three days later after we forcefully paid US\$ 350 each. Furthermore, there were many migrants from different countries, both male and female, in this *Mezra* who had been captured and were unable to pay the amount of money they were requested to pay. Some of them were there for more than seven months.” In general, those migrants who arrived in Europe were those who not only had the capability but also those who were able to survive such life-threatening conditions.

Life After Death in Germany/Europe

After surviving life-threatening journeys, migrants arrive in Europe where they intend to realize their aspirations. But how do Ethiopian migrants judge the realization of their original aspirations in Europe within the context of the dangers they have endured? To cut a long story short, the majority of our respondents rated their satisfaction as low, while the very small proportion got work permits and decent jobs in a very short time rated their satisfaction as higher. Nine out of the twenty informants have residence permits while the other eleven are still without them. Notably, almost all of the interviewees agreed to the assertion that the objective reality of life in Europe is not worth facing the dangers in the Sahara Desert, Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea.

According to the accounts of our respondents, they expected life to be easy in Europe. That is, they saw it as a land of freedom, democracy, and human rights in which it would be easy to acquire a residence permit and where they would find better job and income opportunities, excellent education, and access to advanced technologies. These expectations disappeared when they arrived in Italy and instantly faced structural barriers, such as providing like fingerprints, making asylum applications, and staying at reception centers. Initial experiences like these in Italy tended to confirm for our

respondents what they had been told by their friends and families before setting off on their journey. Case G, for instance, asserts that “most migrants are informed about the dangers of migration journeys and the difficulty of life in Europe. But we reject those advices for two reasons. First, the stories they tell us mismatch with the material and financial changes they show us. Second, we migrants think that ‘we can do it, if they do it.’” Migrants move from Italy to different European countries with the hope of a brighter future. But this hope fades once again when they face similar experiences in Germany’s reception centers.

The gap between expectation and reality is the result of a range of factors, such as asylum processes, formal life conditions, job opportunities, and integration hardships. Unlike in Sudan, where destination migrants work informally and live without permits, residence permits are vital if one wants to live and work in Europe, entitling one to most of the rights that citizens have. A residence permit opens the door for the realization of aspirations, but first one needs to pass through the processes of integration, entitlements to social security benefits, employment, and more. Those who do not have permits are not entitled to attend official integration courses. Without knowledge of how long the asylum process will take, migrants remain in limbo for an undefined period. During this time, they realize the extent of the gap between expectation and reality gap. Our findings show that a majority of migrants had some kind of information about the asylum process, but they neither knew the details nor took it seriously. Most lacked the capacity to frame their asylum cases in an acceptable manner, thus complicating their life circumstances afterwards.

The point we can make here is that the longer it takes to acquire a residence permit, the longer it takes for original aspirations to be realized and the wider the gap between aspiration and reality. Those without permits are not allowed to work unless they are granted special permission, which can be rescinded for reasons entirely out of their grasp. Many of our respondents had their work permits rescinded, like Case F, in turn making other migrants fearful of losing theirs. Migrants without residence permits survive only with social assistance. All in all, life in Germany and Europe at large is not easy for migrants as it is formal and well structured. Those who have acquired residence permits have to participate in an integration process, including a basic language course. After the integration courses, they are supposed to look for employment. Those who need training should go through on the job training or other forms of training. Most are discouraged by language barriers and the formality and structure of the processes. As they are accustomed to casual and precarious circumstances, adapting to such processes is hard.

Discussion

Our study focuses on understanding the complex relationships between aspiration, capability, and foreseeable dangers in translating that aspiration into migration. Carling states that, “today, a person wishing to migrate from a poor country to a wealthy country is likely to find that the greatest barriers are connected to the destination country’s immigration policies” (2002, 22). Our findings, however, challenge some of the assumptions inherent in this model. According to the aspiration/capability model, an aspiring and capable person realizes his/her aspirations by evading immigration barriers. Our observation of Ethiopian migrants who crossed the deadly and dangerous routes of the desert, a war zone, and the sea, shows that migrants voluntarily faced barriers and risks on their journeys, including death and rape, to realize the aspiration to migrate.

The first columns of Table 7.1 show that from 2014 to 2019, a total of 659,588 people from different countries crossed the Mediterranean Sea to arrive in Italy. But 15,453 either died or went missing in the process. If we add the three routes (to Italy, Spain, and Greece) together, the number of those arriving by sea increases to 1,973,051, and the number of those who died or went missing in the same period climbs to 18,480. These figures do not include those who perished or vanished in the Sahara Desert or in Libya. Given the high risks involved, there is clearly a strong element of rational choice involved in realizing one’s wish to migrate regardless of foreseeable dangers. This calls both concepts of aspiration and capability into question.

Table 7.1: Sea arrivals to Italy, dead and missing

Year	Italy		Spain		Greece	
	Sea arrivals	Dead and missing	Sea arrivals	Dead and missing	Sea arrivals	Dead and missing
2019	11,471	750*	26,168		59,726	
2018	23,370	1,311	58,569	811	32,494	174
2017	119,369	2,873	22,103	202	29,718	59
2016	181,436	4,513	8,162	77	173,450	441
2015	153,842	2,913	5,312	59	856,723	799
2014	170,100	3,093			41,038	405
<i>Total</i>	<i>659,588</i>	<i>15,453</i>	<i>120,314</i>	<i>1,149</i>	<i>1,193,149</i>	<i>1,878</i>

Source: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>

*See: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/95?sp=0&geo=0>.

Firstly, as our study suggests, aspiration and capability are not static. Both are context-specific and change through time. The aspiration to migrate evolves in response to a number of factors experienced by an individual migrant. A person who has no aspiration to migrate today, for example, may decide to do so tomorrow, and vice versa. Likewise, a migrant who arrives in their destination country may develop an aspiration to migrate elsewhere, motivated to do so by the new migration environment in which they find themselves. This is exactly what we have observed in this research. Ethiopian destination migrants in Sudan learn from mass transit migrants to Europe. Moreover, those who arrived in Germany aspired to travel on to other European countries.

Secondly, the aspiration/capability model takes financial and social network capabilities into account with the assumption that they contribute to migration. This is clearly true. But not all migrants who decide to do so possess sufficient financial and social network capabilities. Some migrants successfully arrive in Europe without sufficient capabilities. Although their importance should not be underestimated, the nature of capabilities changes on the journey, particularly once migrants meet dangerous circumstances in the Sahara Desert, in war-torn Libya, and in the Mediterranean Sea. Although financial and social network capabilities facilitate migration, they cannot provide the capabilities specifically required by group dynamics in circumstances such as in the desert, in a war zone, or at sea.

In the context of our research, migrants left the areas near to the town of Omdurman, where they were brought from Khartoum to prepare for their journey. This is a juncture and point of no return, mainly because the organization and coordination of the journey is controlled by traffickers rather than migrants themselves. Such circumstances shape group dynamics making a capable person incapable and an incapable person capable. The difference between capable and incapable people can sometimes be very minimal. Following de Haas (2014), we can interpret the decision to migrate as one of using positive liberty to be the master of one's own life and deciding to enter into circumstances that deprive a person of their negative liberty.

Most families and relatives refuse to cooperate with family members who decide to undertake such perilous journeys. Knowing full well that this will be the case, many migrants first inform their families and friends that they are facing difficulties in the middle of their journey or when they arrive in Tripoli or Ajdabiya. At this point, they largely contact their families to request money with which to pay traffickers. In such conditions, families and friends are engaged in a life-saving mission primarily aimed at sparing the lives of their loved ones. Case C said: "my family disagreed with my decision to the extent that my father contacted his friends in Khartoum to ask them to return me. I departed Khartoum in few days without informing my family.

My friends also warned me. Like most migrants, I called my family from Tripoli.” This suggests that migrants use their freedom to decide either to move or stay by themselves and act accordingly. However, the disagreement that often arises between migrants and family members due to the former’s decision to migrate is often met with the latter’s reluctance. Our evidence suggests that the reluctance to cooperate on the part of family members or relatives is largely attributable to the knowability and foreseeability of dangers along the way. Both migrants and families back home know the dangers involved, but they arrive at different conclusions. While migrants decide to face imminent dangers, families and social networks refrain from encouraging their loved ones.

Knowability and Foreseeability of Physical Dangers

The above discussion prompted us to look into the way migrants assess the consequences of foreseeable dangers in their decision-making. Migrants are rational actors who calculate costs and benefits to minimize risks (Jennissen 2007; Arango 2000), aspire and realize their aspirations (Carling 2002), and are capable of freely deciding either to move or stay (de Haas 2014). We might therefore deduce that migrants prefer to stay at home if potential dangers are foreseeable in advance, particularly dangers like death and rape. But our specific examination on the foreseeability of such dangers and the precautionary measures that migrants—particularly women—take in advance invalidates any such assumption. The accounts of our interviewees suggest that most migrants foresaw and knew of potential dangers in advance, although the levels of information they had on such risks varied. A majority of them confirmed that they were aware of risks such as death, being taken hostage, being sold, rape, the war in Libya, and the brutality of smugglers. Some were aware that their own friends or people in their larger networks had died while migrating, whether drowning in the Mediterranean or dying of thirst or hunger in the Sahara Desert. They learned about these risks from friends who had arrived in Europe or were already on their way to Europe, from the news, social media, and other sources. Such news is widely spread in Ethiopia and particularly among migrants in Sudan. Destination migrants in Sudan in particular are close to firsthand information, as most of the smugglers and dealers operate from there.

Our interviewees confirmed that had related their experiences and warned of potential dangers to their friends and family members in Sudan or Ethiopia. Yet, potential migrants in Ethiopia and Sudan tend not to trust the information they receive. Respondents recall that they had the same attitude about the information they received while they were in Ethiopia or Sudan. Most importantly, they rejected advice from family and friends, in

turn causing their family and friends in Ethiopia or Sudan to reject the same advice. Our interviewees realized that their friends and families were now in the same state of ignorance as the migrants themselves had been prior to their departure.

For instance, five out of the twenty interviewees had prior experience of migration. One had migration experience to Saudi Arabia through Eritrea, the Red Sea, and Yemen.⁶ Two had failed migration experiences through Djibouti. Another two had failed experiences and had returned to Sudan from the Sahara Desert, one accompanied by the Libyan military and the other one by a UNHCR repatriation program. Interestingly, they tried again. Case E, for example, stated: “during my first trial I buried more than twenty of my fellow travelers including two of my close friends in the Sahara Desert.” Case F added that “before my first attempt in 2012, while I was in Sudan, I was informed about the death of my own close friend in the Desert. I tried in 2012 and was repatriated by the UNHCR from Egypt due to a change of route from Benghazi to Egypt, where we were captured by Egyptian police. I tried for second time in 2014 with thirty-two other migrants.”

Another important indicator of knowability and foreseeability of dangers is the precautionary measures migrants take in advance of their departure. In this case, the precautions taken by female migrants tells us a lot about the knowability of potential dangers. Three precautionary measures are particularly worth mentioning. First of all, we found that female migrants use birth control before their departure in the light of the stories they have heard about the incidence of rape. Secondly, some female migrants pretend to be in relationships with male migrants traveling with them in order to avoid being raped and because they have been informed that smugglers are respectful to married women. Thirdly, migrants take religious and cultural practices into account and try to adjust themselves and behave accordingly. Many believe that women who are with their husband, respect cultural norms, and are well mannered are less likely to be raped. Whether these precautionary measures work or not depends on the context and the particular migration experiences. But these precautionary measures taken by women shows that rape and abuse are foreseen and the risk of them must be diminished. Therefore, although migrants are rational actors who calculate migration costs and benefits to minimize risks, we still need to make sense of the

6 This interviewee had been to Saudi Arabia twice in 1995–96 and 1997. During his first attempt, he crossed Eritrea, the Red Sea, and Yemen to arrive in Saudi Arabia. He was deported back to Ethiopia after staying for eleven months. In January 1997, he returned to Saudi Arabia using the same route and was once again deported after staying for seven months. In March 2012, he left Ethiopia for Sudan.

fact that they decide, using their positive freedoms, to enter into a condition that deprives them of their negative freedoms in order to realize their aspiration to migrate. The next part of the discussion explores these reasons.

Decision-Triggering Factors: A Reflection on Aspiration and Capability

According to the above discussion, it seems evident that aspiration and capability are necessary factors in migrants' decisions to undertake potentially perilous journeys. They are not, however, sufficient for explaining migrants' motivations. This is largely because aspiration and capability do not explain why migrants are ready to encounter those foreseeable dangers that we have presented in this study. We therefore need a third variable that triggers the decision to migrate. We call this the "decision-triggering factor." Together with aspiration and capability, decision-triggering factors are important in explaining not only voluntary mobility and voluntary/involuntary immobility, but also the movements of both migrants who decide to face imminent dangers and migrants who lack capabilities. An aspiring migrant who has limited capability may decide to migrate. For example, migrants lacking resources (i.e., the capability) need to seek employment in Khartoum, Benghazi, or Tripoli to cover the cost of their previous travel or crossing the Mediterranean Sea; in addition, with the exception of those who are taken hostages in Libya and the Sahara Desert, those who are held captive by traffickers are mostly people who are not able to pay the amount of money they originally agreed to pay. In such circumstances, human traffickers decide either to take them hostage until they pay the money, to sell them to another trafficker, to leave them in the Desert, or to use them for forced labor.

Decision-triggering factors can be conceptualized as the conditions and issues that make a person *finally* decide to depart. A person who decides to migrate organizes and starts the journey regardless of their level of aspiration and capability. Factors that might trigger the decision to migrate include: hearing about other migrants successfully arriving in their destination countries or crossing danger zones; learning about "weak" people, such as children, women, and pregnant women who have completed their journeys; the influence of peers; being bombarded with information about migration; learning of seemingly welcoming immigration policies in other countries; and access to dealers and traffickers.

Aspiration and capability are therefore not preconditions to all migrants. Some may decide without prior aspiration and without taking their capability into account. Instead, their circumstances, the information they receive, and their network trigger their decision. They start their journey with the capability they have at hand, for instance the amount to pay for their initial

trip. In some cases, those who make spontaneous decisions have more information and awareness than those who have been aspiring to leave for a long time and are capable. They could have been closer to successful migrants, emigration environments, and dealers. The idea “if they do it, I can do it” has greater potential to motivate. By contrast, aspiring and capable people may delay their decision until they believe the right conditions obtain. They may also delay in the face of immigration barriers, as Carling (2002) argues.

The World of Migrants

In order to understand the decision-making of migrants in the face of imminent dangers, one needs to look at issues beyond aspiration and capability. Hence, we contextualize mass migration and migration decisions in the context of the world of migrants. Migrants think and operate in a different context, one that is directly related to the operation of their service providers like dealers and human traffickers, their emigration environments, and immigration policies. That is the main reason for the complexity of their decision-making process. If we follow the aspiration/capabilities model, it is difficult to describe a person who is informed about potential dangers and yet decides to cross the Sahara Desert, war-torn Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea in order to arrive in Europe as a rational actor. Most of our respondents described their decisions as “abnormal,” “madness,” or “crazy.” Surprisingly, they admitted that it was “abnormal” not to trust the information they had received from their own friends and families about the potential dangers of the trip and about the circumstances they would face in Europe. The only justification they eventually offered was that they chose between life and death. On the one hand, Europe is the land on to which they project their dreams; on the other hand, their lives in Ethiopia and Sudan—as destination country—amount to death. They therefore see no difference between dying in the desert and living in their own country or Sudan.

Migrants therefore simultaneously construct optimistic and pessimistic attitudes. Optimistic attitudes provide migrants with a positive and affirmative outlook about Europe, where everything is possible and everything is the best it could possibly be. By contrast, pessimistic attitudes provide a negative and unfavorable outlook about their own country and their intermediate destination country, where everything is impossible and the worst. This complex mindset applies to the majority of migrants regardless of their social, economic, or professional status. Migration to the West therefore becomes the life goal for migrants that they will realize when the right conditions are fulfilled. At the same time, others spontaneously decide when certain conditions trigger their decisions regardless of whether they aspire or have capabilities.

In that sense, migrants conceptualize two physical worlds and one ideal world. Europe is the ideal world, which is optimistic and full of hope. Ethiopia—and Sudan as destination country—together with immigration barriers and foreseeable dangers represent the real, physical worlds. They decide to run away from the certain death promised by the latter to arrive in the optimistic world. In simple terms, we can consider this as a rite of passage from pessimistic to optimistic world. Accordingly, any potential dangers they know and foresee in the Sahara Desert, in Libya, and in the Mediterranean Sea are considered to be sacrifices that should be made in order to transition to the world of their dreams that they had romanticized about long before their departure. The irony is that they see the huge gap between their aspirations and reality only very shortly after arriving in Europe. As shown above, the optimistic world remains idealistic and unreachable. Migrants therefore often construct further optimistic worlds to which they can migrate. This is exactly what we have observed, where migrants with resident permits in Germany migrate to the UK. Here, Germany becomes the pessimistic world and the UK the ideal world.

Conclusion

Based on the lived experiences of members of the Ethiopian diaspora in Germany, the present study employed Carling's aspiration/ability model (Carling 2002; Carling and Schewel 2018) to make sense of the underlying causes of migration among Ethiopians in the face of imminent dangers and intractable immigration policies that are rarely in their favor. The key findings from in-depth biographical interviews with our respondents currently living in Germany indicate that when migrants' source societies construct optimistic attitudes about life and immigration policies elsewhere, migrants become ready to face foreseeable dangers in order to realize their aspirations. At the heart of such strong motivations lie two fundamental ways of thinking. The first is that the mass movement of migrants exerts great influence: the belief that "if they do it, I can do it" dominates migrants' decisions. The second is that migrants see foreseeable dangers in comparison with their experiences of life in their countries of origin and in their intermediate destination countries. Even though social networks discourage migrants from embarking on deadly journeys, migrants decide to enter danger zones that end up involving their families and social networks in "lifesaving" missions. At heart, the strong motivation to migrate and the decision to face imminent dangers are the result of the pessimistic and optimistic attitudes that migrants construct concerning life in their country and Europe, respectively. Their expectations of life in Europe remain unattainable, as they continue

to experience a physical world beset with further challenges in the form of harsh immigration policies and unwelcoming integration environments.

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Chapter 8

Drivers and Patterns of Ethiopian Youth Migration to Global Destinations

Tekalign Ayalew

Introduction

For a number of years now Ethiopia has had one of the highest emigration and asylum-seeking rates of all the countries in Africa. This has resulted in the emergence of a vibrant Ethiopian global diaspora. Every year, an estimated six hundred thousand Ethiopians migrate to major destination countries in the Middle East, Europe, the US, South Africa, and Australia.¹ About 70 percent of Ethiopian migrants to international destinations comprise young men and women aged between sixteen and twenty-two, who undertake risky journeys over land and sea to reach African, Middle Eastern, and European destinations.² While low-skilled young men from villages tend to disproportionately migrate southward to South Africa, the less educated young women migrate to Middle Eastern and Gulf countries for domestic

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- 1 Girmachew Adugna, “Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration to the Middle East: Patterns, Trends, and Drivers,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 6–19.
 - 2 Tekalign Ayalew, Fekadu Adugna, and Priya Deshingkar, “Social Embeddedness of Human Smuggling in East Africa: Brokering Ethiopian Migration to Sudan,” *African Human Mobility Review* 4, no. 3 (2018): 1333–58.; Fekadu Adugna, Priya Deshingkar, and Tekalign Ayalew, “Brokers, Migrants and the State: Berri Kefach ‘door openers’ in Ethiopian Clandestine Migration to South Africa,” working paper 56, University of Sussex, Sussex (May 2019).

work. But those who travel northward to Europe are a mixture of young men and women, whether educated or less educated, from both rural and urban areas of the country.³ International migration is also accompanied by a wide range of return migrations and circulation between Ethiopia and international destinations.

Structural, social, familial, and individual conditions drive youth emigration from Ethiopia. However, these categories of factors are interrelated, overlap, and often causal. They are therefore analytic categories rather than distinctive typologies. We need to move beyond a simplistic and deterministic push-pull model of migration if we want to study the specific challenges of young people in Ethiopia and the intermediate conditions that generate migration aspirations, decisions, and sustain continued migrations over-time.⁴ This would shed more light on the complex migration patterns and mass migratory exits of the youth from Ethiopia. There are different levels that inform the decision to migrate. Some young people are desperate due to challenging personal, political, and economic conditions and take dangerous overland journeys to destinations where they seek asylum or stay clandestinely. Others take safer paths, such as travelling for education and through family connections to leave the country both voluntarily and legally.⁵ In between there is formal labor mobility to Gulf States through the facilitation of overseas employment agencies. The divide between forced and voluntary migration is therefore not a binary opposition but a continuum and a matter of degree, and migrants leave for mixed reasons using mixed methods.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight how challenges in the lives of young people in Ethiopia, such as economic hardships, social pressures, the decline of the value of education, and the emergence of migration facilitation infrastructures, shape migration decisions, the choice of destinations, and the pathways used. This chapter is based on empirical literature reviews of migration patterns in Ethiopia. It also draws on my own extended empirical studies in places of origin and border regions in Ethiopia, transit countries such as Sudan and Italy, and destination locations such as Sweden, the UK, and the UAE. I have been conducting fieldwork and interviewing diverse

3 Tekalign Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility: Risk, Hope and Community of Knowledge in Eritrean and Ethiopian Migration pathways towards Sweden," *Anthropologie & développement* 46, no. 47 (2017): 265–67.

4 Jørgen Carling and Francis Collins, "Aspiration, Desire and Drivers of Migration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (2018): 909–26.

5 Girmachew Adugna, "Migration Patterns and Emigrants' Transnational Activities: Comparative Findings from two Migrant Origin Areas in Ethiopia," *Comparative Migration Studies* 7, no. 5 (2019): 1–28.

groups of migrants, state agencies, and brokers in those locations for about a decade.

In the following, I first elaborate on how uncertainty, risk, and hope shape youth migration in Ethiopia, before discussing economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty and their links with youth migrations. The third section deals with how societal expectations drive and reproduce migration, moving on to discuss how diaspora and how the West is imagined by the youth shape their migration aspirations and decisions. I then consider the failure of modern education to perform its traditional role of protecting families and their hopes of youth social mobility, which is replaced by migration. Following that, I explore the role of overseas/private employment agencies and brokers in facilitating and sustaining Ethiopian migration to Gulf States despite strict migration controls in destination countries, before turning to discuss migration barriers, return, and remigration in Ethiopia. The final section draws this all together with some concluding remarks.

Negotiating Risk and Hope

Notions of risk and hope shape contemporary youth migration in Africa.⁶ Migration in general, and the risky migration of young people in particular, have become socially and morally acceptable and an institutionalized practice in many parts of contemporary Africa and Ethiopia.⁷ In the face of challenging socioeconomic conditions, many African youth cannot fulfil personal and societal expectations. Henrik Vigh has coined the concept of a *social moratorium on youth*, describing it as “a predicament of not being able to gain the status and responsibility of adulthood . . . a social position that people seek to escape as it is characterized by marginality, stagnation and a truncation of a social being.”⁸ María Hernández-Carretero and Jørgen Carling note that the “notions of manhood, honour, pride, responsibility, and courage intertwine in West African migrants’ decisions of dangerous boat migration to Europe via Canary Islands . . . young men engage in such high-risk migration

6 Nauja Kleist, “Introduction,” in *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, ed. Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 1–20.

7 Milena Belloni, “Refugees as Gamblers: Eritreans Seeking to Migrate through Italy,” *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 104–19; and Ayalew, Adugna, and Deshingkar “Social Embeddedness,” 1335.

8 Henrik E. Vigh, “Social Death and Violent Life Chances,” in *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context*, ed. Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas, and Henrik E. Vigh (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006), 31–60, here 37.

in order to ensure his independence, assist his family, and, ultimately, restore a tarnished sense of dignity.”⁹

From the perspective adopted in this study, migration is a process informed by risk and shaped by the dialectical relationship between risk and hope. Anthropologically, hope is a future-oriented stance for a good life and performs a role as a social resource in collectively mobilizing energy in everyday struggles, including the need to keep going in bad times.¹⁰ In many parts of contemporary Africa, some young people assume and hope that “normal life”—such as a family, a career, and stability—can be achieved by migrating (often involving high-risk border crossings) to other stable and promising places.¹¹

Migration can be both a symbol and an enactment of hope and faith in the future and an act of or a reaction to hopelessness, despair, and acute loss in the present.¹² In many parts of Africa, including Ethiopia, aspirations and practices of risky migratory exits have become the key response to contemporary uncertainties related to rapid social changes that are, in themselves, partially the result of state failure, conflict, economic stagnation, and violence.¹³ Cindy Horst and Katarzyna Grabska define the concept of uncertainty as “imperfect knowledge and unpredictability of the future” in the face of life’s precariousness.¹⁴ They also rightly point out that “coming to terms with uncertainty, then, is not about calculated risk taking but about coping through hope, waiting, negotiating, and navigating.”¹⁵ Indeed, uncertainty, particularly in the African context, should not be seen as passivity and victimhood. Uncertainty could be understood as a social resource for facilitating new social relationships, creativity, innovation, and

9 María Hernández-Carretero and Jørgen Carling, “Beyond ‘Kamikaze Migrants’: Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe,” *Human Organization* 71, no. 4 (2012): 407–16, here 411.

10 Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Vida Pavesich, “The Anthropology of Hope and the Philosophy of History: Rethinking Kant’s Third and Fourth Questions with Blumberg and McCarthy,” *Sage* 104, no. 1 (2011): 20–39.

11 Hernández-Carretero and Carling, “Beyond ‘Kamikaze Migrants,’” 410.

12 Frances Pine, “Migration as Hope: Space, Time, and Imagining the Future,” *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 9 (2014): S95–S104.

13 Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Kleist, “Introduction,” 26.

14 Cindy Horst, and Katarzyna Grabska, “Introduction: Flight and Exile—Uncertainty in the Context of Conflict-induced Displacement,” *Social Analysis* 59, no. 1 (2015): 1–18, here 4.

15 *Ibid.*, 5.

transformation, often through collective practices and interactions with other actors to re-establish certainty and safety.¹⁶

These notions of uncertainty and hope are particularly relevant to contemporary overland migrations from Ethiopia. Following the end of the civil war and the subsequent toppling of the socialist military dictatorship in Ethiopia in 1991, many hoped for stability and “progress in life.” However, the country entered another phase of political and economic crisis and a large proportion of the youth felt trapped in uncertainties and deprived of hope.¹⁷ This period also coincided with Ethiopia’s inclusion in the processes of globalization, albeit in a subordinate role.¹⁸ With the expansion of interconnections to global systems and access to information on unequal consumption patterns as well as daily flows of diasporic remittances, young people in Ethiopia now feel deprived and excluded. Many assume that remaining in Ethiopia involves social and economic risk and therefore seek hope and certainty in moving and migrating to other locations.¹⁹ In addition, the assumptions that the quality of life and the safety of themselves and their children (through access to good education and career paths) would improve abroad, partly condition choices regarding migration strategies, the refusal to stay in refugee camps in neighboring countries, and current overland departures.

In this context of migration, hope has temporal and spatial dimensions.²⁰ It is about feeling that “now and here” there are risks but “there and then” there is hope for better conditions and opportunities, despite the risk of losing one’s life (e.g., when crossing vast deserts and high seas using unsafe means). However, hope and risk should not be seen as static notions or as in binary opposition; rather, they can be used as analytic categories that disclose one dimension of otherwise very complicated processes involved in the decision to migrate. Doing so sheds more light on the multiple challenges and life trajectories of young people in Africa and their migration decisions in.²¹ It should be also noted that hope is about imaginations of achieving better conditions through migration. However, it is not a linear assumption

16 Ibid., 7; Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten, *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa* (London: Palgrave, 2015).

17 Daniel Mains, *Hope is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012).

18 Joris Schapendonk, “Turbulent Trajectories: African Migrants on their Way to European Union,” *Societies* 2 (2012): 27–41.

19 Mains, *Hope is Cut*, 20.

20 Roberta Raffactàn, “Hope Emplaced: What Happens to Hope After Arrival. The Case of Ecuadorian Families Living in Italy,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 16 (2015): 116–22; Kleist, “Introduction,” 35.

21 Kleist, “Introduction,” 29.

that all young people equate migration with success and certainty while seeing staying as equivalent to failure and uncertainty. Indeed, not all young people in Ethiopia are hopeless and not all of them are desperately leaving the country. Many youths often seek to expand their opportunities, navigating multiple and at times contradictory spaces and possibilities; they attempt to be here and there, now and then often simultaneously.

Not all young people are victims of structural or direct violence or stuck in the face of deprivation. When “their hope is cut,” they do not give up and engage in crimes or hide behind addictions, thus living up to a stereotype that has colored some academics’ perspectives on unemployed young men in the south. Instead, young people respond to uncertainties and indeterminacies differently and even creatively:²² some use and make relations and networks to look for hope in uncertain and the most depriving socioeconomic and political environment, while others engage in political activism, protests, or armed resistance to bring about social change.²³ Many others find niches in existing socioeconomic and political systems and try to “progress in life.”²⁴ Those who are desperate take risks and embark on migration journeys to places they assume are safe and economically secure. In other words, unfavorable conditions and structural imbalance in the demography create a situation in which people try to find different solutions. One of them is to follow the pathways taken by many before: migration. Migration is one of many life strategies in which the youth engage, and it too is accompanied by uncertainties, failure, and regret.

Like in a number of other African contexts, some young Ethiopians assume that staying is merely to wait for a slow social and physical death as many are unable to fulfil personal desires and family expectations,²⁵ including earning a stable income, getting married, and starting a family. The feeling of being stuck in the course of one’s life drives young people towards making overland exits as well as multiple transitions,²⁶ including deportations and remigrations, across the Sahara Desert, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean Sea. Hope, although it is not about complete certainty about the future and success in migration, is also an energy and source of endurance, especially when migrants find themselves in conditions of

22 Cooper and Pratten, “Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa.”

23 Ayalew, “Struggle for Mobility,” 270.

24 Marco di Nunzio, “What is the Alternative? Youth, Entrepreneurship and the Developmental State in Urban Ethiopia,” *Development and Change* 46, no. 5 (2015): 1179–1200.

25 Henrik E. Vigh, “Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation,” *Anthropological Theories* 9, No. 4 (2009): 419–38.

26 Ghassan Hage, *Waiting* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2009).

prolonged waiting in the migration process²⁷; for example, when waiting in Libya or for a way out of the camps, for the right season, for *delaloch* (smugglers) to arrange boats to cross the Mediterranean Sea, and for papers or decisions on asylum applications to their destination country. Undoubtedly, risky migratory journeys also involve regret, disappointment, and loss of hope when migrants encounter poor refugee receptions in Europe or their asylum applications are rejected, destinations or experiencing various abuses in Gulf States as domestic workers compelling them to live precarious lives as undocumented migrants.²⁸

Migration, particularly moving to and settling in Europe, has, in Alessandro Monsutti's terms, become "a necessary stage in their existence, a rite of passage to adulthood"²⁹; and, in the Ethiopian context, it is a step towards diaspora.³⁰ Here, diaspora refers to an emic view of being an immigrant in the West, where individuals "can acquire" the necessary "skill," "knowledge," and money to improve their personal and family life as well as contribute "to develop[ing] one's country of origin."

Patterns of Youth Out-Migration from Ethiopia

The low-skilled young men from villages, mainly districts in the southern parts of Ethiopia such as Hadiya, Kambata, and Wolayta, tend to disproportionately migrate southwards to South Africa. This migration to South Africa started in the 2000s, when then Ethiopian Ambassador to South Africa, Tesfaye Habiso, supported a few of his relatives from the same region to migrate to South Africa.³¹ This initial arrival and subsequent expanded networks, together with the involvement of smugglers and the spread of

27 Shahram Khosravi, "Waiting," in *Migration: A COMPAS Anthology*, ed. Bridget Anderson and Michael Keith (Oxford: COMPAS, 2014), 66–67.

28 Nicholas De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419–47.

29 Alessandro Monsutti, "Migration as a Rite of Passage: Young Afghans Building Masculinity and Adulthood in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 167–95, here 169.

30 Abye Tassé, "My New Filipino is an Ethiopian," in *Reconfiguring Citizenship: Social Exclusion and Diversity within Inclusive Citizenship Practices*, ed. Dominelli Lena and Moosa-Mitha Mehmoona (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 96–103; Milena Belloni, "Cosmologies of Destinations: Roots and Routes of Eritrean Forced Migration towards Europe" (PhD diss., University of Trento, 2015).

31 Yordanos Seifu Estifanos, *Wayfarers: Travel Journal* (Addis Ababa: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2018).

success stories of prior migrants, finally resulted in a massive flow of migration to South Africa. Currently, estimated two- to three-hundred thousand Ethiopian migrants reside in South Africa.³² Particularly rural areas of the Hadiya district, which is one of the sites of this study, has a well-established and dynamic system of migration brokerage that links villages and towns in Southern Ethiopia with chains of smugglers in transiting border towns and countries. Many families have lost at least one member in this migration due to violence, starvation, drowning, and other forms of exposure to hardships during journeys. The route starts from Hadiya, passes via Moyale (Ethiopian-Kenyan border), and moves on across several countries in Eastern and Southern Africa all the way to South Africa. Over time, a “culture of migration” has developed, resulting in the system of chain migration and circulation between Hadiya and South Africa.³³ The migration journeys along the southern route may take many months, traveling through several countries including Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.³⁴ Migrants often travel by foot, container trucks, and buses passing through dangerous and hostile terrain including Mount Kilimanjaro and several precarious migrant boats travel over the Indian Ocean where many Hadiya migrants die or go missing.³⁵

The less-educated young women migrate to the Middle Eastern and Gulf countries for domestic work. Ethiopia has long historical relations with the Middle East through trade and religious pilgrimages.³⁶ In recent years, the Middle Eastern and Gulf countries have become major destinations for Ethiopian labor migrants. For example, between 2009 and 2014, nearly half a million Ethiopian labor migrants moved to the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and Qatar.³⁷

32 Asnake Kfale and Zerihun Mohammed, *Ethiopian Labour Migration to the Gulf and South Africa* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2015); Estifanos, *Wayfarers*.

33 Estifanos, *Wayfarers*.

34 Fekadu Adugna, Priya Deshingkar, and Tekalign Ayalew, *Brokers, Migrants and the State: Berri Kefach “Door Openers” in Ethiopian Clandestine Migration to South Africa* (Brighton: University of Sussex, 2019).

35 295IOM, “Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost during Migration,” accessed December 25, 2020, <https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/pbn/docs/Fatal-Journeys-Tracking-Lives-Lost-during-Migration-2014.pdf>.

36 Marina de Regt and Medareshaw Tafesse, “Deported Before Experiencing the Good Sides of Migration: Ethiopians Returning from Saudi Arabia,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2016): 228–42.

37 Girmachew Zewdu, “Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration to the Middle East: Patterns, Trends, and Drivers,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 6–19, here 10–19.

More than 90 percent were women, mainly less educated and from rural parts of Ethiopia. This migration is facilitated by Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) residing in Ethiopia and destination countries. Following the enactment of the Overseas Employment Proclamation in 1998 and its amendment in 2015 (proclamation number 923/2016) more than six hundred PEAs have been established in Ethiopia and deployed more than three hundred thousand Ethiopian domestic labor migrants in Gulf Countries. However, in recent years when migration through legal channels by PEAs became bureaucratic, time consuming, and costly, many Ethiopians started using smuggling services to migrate to Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia by crossing Djibouti, the Red Sea, and Yemen or Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, and Yemen.³⁸ These journeys involve dangerous and long trails across deserts, difficult terrains, war-torn Yemen, and the Red Sea until they arrive in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia alone hosts an estimated one million Ethiopian migrants and most of them are undocumented migrants often exposed to labor exploitation, sexual and physical violence, and death by different actors including employers.³⁹

Those Ethiopians who make long journeys northward to Europe are a mixture of young men and women of varying levels of education and from both rural and urban areas of the country.⁴⁰ These migrants make long journeys to Europe via the Sudan, Sahara Desert, Libya, and crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Different actors are involved in the process, such as smugglers, family members in one's homeland, former migrants en route and in the diaspora, bus, taxi, or lorry drivers, and local people along the routes. Migrants accomplish long overland journeys through knowledge and resources acquired, developed, and shared by those in transit and their communities. For example, from Addis Ababa *delaloch* arrange particular transport services to cross borders, deserts, and seas; informal money transfer systems; travel routes with knowledgeable guides; and appropriate hiding spaces.⁴¹ Former migrants settled along the route and in destination locations provide necessary information for prospective migrants about routes, smugglers, timings, how to behave during interactions with smugglers, and shelter and temporary jobs in transit countries. However, despite these support networks, migrants face extremely challenging conditions during their journeys to Europe: first during their journey across the Sahara Desert,

38 Ibid., 10.

39 De Regt and Tafesse, "Deported"; Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration," 13.

40 Ayalew, Adugna, and Deshingkar, "Social Embeddedness of Human Smuggling," 1336.

41 Ibid., 1338.

when traveling through Libya, and finally while crossing the Mediterranean Sea before arriving in the European mainland.⁴² The journey is risky and unpredictable given the obstacles that migrants encounter along the route, such as criminal attacks, exposure to harsh environments, detention by border guards, and kidnapping for ransom money by criminals.

Economic Challenges

Poverty and unemployment have been cited as main driving factors of youth migrations. An estimated two to three million young people enter the labor market every year while growing youth unemployment adds to existing migratory pressures.⁴³ About 70 percent of Ethiopia's population of 110 million is under the age of thirty.⁴⁴ More than 80 percent of the population still live in rural areas, mainly in the impoverished and depleted highlands, and engage in rainfall-dependent small-scale farming. As the country lacks technical and economic capacity, smallholder farmers are often vulnerable to weather fluctuations, climate change, and consequent droughts and famine, which generally produce displacement as well as labor and refugee migrations abroad.⁴⁵

Despite the Ethiopian economy recording its fastest rate of growth for more than two decades, according to the Human Development Index in the past two decades Ethiopia has continued to be one of the poorest countries in the world.⁴⁶ Poverty continues to be rampant, with 26 percent of the population earning less than \$0.60 per day.⁴⁷ In fact, the sustainability of

42 IOM, "Fatal Journeys"; Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), "Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa and Yemen," (Spring 2019), accessed December 25, 2020, <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/quarterly-mixed-migration-update-eay-q2-2019>.

43 Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration," 15.

44 Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility," 269.

45 Assefaw Bariagaber, *Conflict and the Refugee Experience: Flight, Exile, and Repatriation in the Horn of Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Peter Gill, *Famine and Foreigner: Ethiopia since Live Aid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

46 UNDP, "National Human Development Report 2014: Accelerating Inclusive Growth for Sustainable Human Development in Ethiopia," accessed December 25, 2020, <https://docplayer.net/12762478-Accelerating-inclusive-growth-for-sustainable-human-development-in-ethiopia.html>; Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility," 271.

47 UNDP, "National Human Development"; Adugna, "Migration Patterns and Emigrants' Transnational Activities"; René Lefort, "The Ethiopian

economic growth has been questioned: the country recently suffered high inflation rates (64.20 percent in 2018), excessive dependence on foreign aid (US\$ 4 billions or 45 percent of the national budget in 2014), and a negative external trade balance.⁴⁸ The youth unemployment rate in certain urban areas of Ethiopia is estimated to be 50 percent.⁴⁹ Growth statistics on macro-economic performance often overlook everyday realities. Marco di Nunzio argues that the distribution of economic growth benefits has been unequal and, even though services and goods are available in the cities, many do not have the income capacity to access them.⁵⁰

Di Nunzio and other scholars further argue that the massive small-scale enterprise development programs and access to microcredits for the youth through cooperatives not only create higher inequalities but also fail to improve social mobility for some of those involved in the program.⁵¹ Studies show that some young people use microcredit money given to youth cooperatives to pay human smugglers who facilitate overland migration and sea crossings towards the Middle East and Europe and private overseas labor recruitment agencies sending workers to Arab countries.⁵²

Girmachew Adugna states that economic considerations are the main driver of migration among young female domestic labor migrants.⁵³ He cites Katie Kuschminder and Melissa Siegel's study of 1,282 households across fifteen communities in Ethiopia, which found that around three quarters of them migrated to find employment.⁵⁴ The main driver of migration for domestic work is poverty and a resulting desire to improve family living standards through remittances. Migration tends to be a household strategy. Poverty is the main but not the only reason why Ethiopian girls and women migrate to become domestic workers. In addition to escaping poverty, for adolescent girls migration offers an escape from early marriage, oppressive social norms, and the lack of control over their lives.⁵⁵

Economy: The Developmental State vs. the Free Market," in *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and the Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, ed. Gérard Prunier and Éloi Ficquet (London: Hurst, 2015), 357–94.

48 UNDP, "National Human Development"; Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility."

49 Mains, *Hope is Cut*; Lefort, "The Ethiopian Economy"; Adugna, "Migration Patterns and Emigrants' Transnational Activities."

50 Di Nunzio, "What is the Alternative?"

51 Di Nunzio, "What is the Alternative?": Lefort, "The Ethiopian Economy."

52 Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility."

53 Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration."

54 Katie Kuschminder, and Melissa Siegel, "Determinants of Diaspora policy Engagement of Ethiopians in the Netherlands," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2016): 184–99.

55 Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration."

The economic challenges are compounded by ethnic extremism and violent conflicts that have displaced hundreds and thousands of people in many parts of Ethiopia. The coming to power of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister on April 2, 2018 brought sweeping political changes, including thorough reform of the security services, the release of political prisoners, and making peace with Eritrea. Nevertheless, Ethiopia has faced daunting challenges. One of these challenges is internal displacement. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated that between 2018 and April 2020 Ethiopia recorded the third highest number of new displacements worldwide, with 3,191,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). A large number of IDPs returned to their original communities but still more than one million live in unpleasant IDP centers nationwide while many youngsters left the country using the services of human smugglers. A significant portion of these displacements are conflict-induced, largely related to ethnic and border-based disputes. Many of them are also climate-induced displacement mainly caused by drought and floods.⁵⁶

Social Pressure

As I mentioned above, for young people, staying in Ethiopia is risky given the unfulfilled social expectations, political repression, and limited gainful economic opportunities. To borrow Daniel Mains's words, "hope is cut."⁵⁷ Many young people say "there is no future in this country," revealing their desperate feeling of relative deprivation or being stuck and waiting for a slow "social and physical death."⁵⁸ Thus, despite all the risks involved in very the act of escaping and migrating, there is an element of hope which may in time win out over the negative consequences of staying put.

Mains argues that the educated youth in Ethiopia dream of modernization and progress, something that is often measured against western lifestyles and local expectations. They desire material goods, such as owning a house and car, and prestige through better paid white-collar employment. At the same time, however, these same young people are expected to support a family, get married, start their own family in turn, and, finally, become

56 IOM, "Ethiopia National Displacement Report Round 18: July–August 2019," accessed December 25, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/DTM%20Ethiopia%20R18%20National%20Displacement%20Report%20v5.pdf>.

57 Mains, *Hope is Cut*, 130; Belloni, "Cosmologies of Destinations."

58 Vigh, "Motion Squared."

respectable community members.⁵⁹ The youth's heightened aspirations are associated with increased access to modern education, international media, movies, and the Internet. Modern education, global media, and the film industry visualize the lifestyles and consumption patterns of other parts of the world, which highly influence daily imaginations.⁶⁰ This translates into aspirations for enhanced social status through material accumulations and fulfilling social and familial obligations.

However, as Mains also notes, unemployment and shame or social stigma associated with taking up informal jobs in one's hometown deprives educated youngsters' economic independence in certain parts of Ethiopia. Mains shows that the challenges of an educated young adult in current Ethiopia are related to neoliberal structural adjustments that create a gap between youth aspirations and economic realities, combined with *yi lugnta* (lit. social shame), all of which comes together to further deprive young people with low-status informal jobs, such as daily laborers, cleaners, vendors, shoe shiners, and porters, who still live in their birthplace.⁶¹ According to Mains, "to have *yilugnta* is to experience an intense shame based on what others may say or think about oneself and one's family."⁶² Lower availability of white-collar jobs and the social stigma associated with low-status jobs lead to further unemployment. Faced with these predicaments, certain young adults consider migration a spatial solution to being stuck in time. Some youth pass their spare time by consuming *khaat/qat* (a mild stimulant leaf that is chewed) and watching films, and some of them may have been dreaming of international migration, mainly to the US.⁶³

In many parts of Ethiopia, migration becomes a cultural and social process. Adugna identifies that in major migrant-sending areas, such as Gondar and Wollo in northern Ethiopia and Hadiya and Kambata in southern Ethiopia, international migration is highly valued by the society.⁶⁴ He writes:

In Gondar where social status is increasingly defined through migration, many well-to-do families send members [younger ones] abroad not only as a source of remittances but as a source of pride. However, the departure of these "social migrants" can also be a strategy to diversify risk over the longer term. This suggests that migration is a social process on the one hand,

59 Mains, *Hope is Cut*, 125.

60 Schapendonk, "Turbulent Trajectories"; James Ferguson, *Global Shadow: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

61 Mains, *Hope is Cut*.

62 Ibid., 11.

63 Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility"; Mains, *Hope is Cut*.

64 Adugna, "Migration Patterns and Emigrants' Transnational Activities."

and wealth is both a cause and consequence of migration on the other. In Gondar, the “culture of migration” has developed over the years and, many have migrated to America.⁶⁵

In those migrant-sending areas migration gives rise to further migration. This is partly because earlier migrants who become established diasporans in destinations, such as the US, South Africa, and Gulf States, facilitate new migration through marriage, covering migration costs by sending remittances, arranging accommodation in destinations, and facilitating overseas employment contracts. These transnational networks do not just generate international migration; they also sustain migration over time.

Imagination of the West and the Influence of Diaspora

Prospective migrants perceive Europe and the US as a “place of hope,” “comfort,” and “wealth”, mainly owing to western media, movies, and diaspora, which generally disseminate this type of imagery of the West to people in the global South.⁶⁶ It is common for diasporic migrants to display extravagant consumption and expenditure patterns during their visits to Ethiopia in the presence of disadvantaged young adults. This is because they either are on vacation or simply consider it important to demonstrate their prosperity given that they were also at the risk of remaining unsuccessful. Indeed, former migrants and diasporans rarely tell people left behind about the difficulties they encountered in Europe or in their destination countries; rather, they portray their achievements through their material remittances and by building beautiful villas in their countries of origin.⁶⁷ This shows how former migrants’ success stories overpower other narratives about migration and become factors driving migratory departures, including overland journeys.

The issues of migration, remittances, and diaspora have become a part of everyday narratives among those members of Ethiopia’s youth who have heightened migration aspirations. Domestic mass media, the film industry, the public, and policymakers often praise the so-called “knowledge and skill transfers” and how remittance money and returnees’ investments “improve” individuals, households, and the country as a whole.⁶⁸ In Ethiopia, moving abroad and becoming a member of the diaspora is an emic narrative in daily

65 Ibid., 14.

66 Schapendonk, “Turbulent Trajectories,” 10.

67 Belloni, “Cosmologies of Destinations.”

68 Tassé, “My New Filipino is an Ethiopian”; Kuschminder and Siegel, “Determinants of Diaspora Policy Engagement.”

life associated with material accumulation, better education, and the attainment of higher social status. These, in turn, have significantly affected young peoples' imaginations and aspirations regarding international migration.

However, potential migrants are also aware of the failure and disaster that migrants encounter during and after migration, often leading to them not becoming members of the diaspora. For instance, there are reports of migrants dying as a result of illness or lack of access to medical treatment in detention centers.⁶⁹ Having to pursue more remote and distant pathways in an effort to reach a destination also means higher risks of violence against migrants. Cases of migrants dying of suffocation in containers or lorries, and of migrants—dead or alive—being deliberately thrown into the sea by smugglers from overcrowded boats are often reported by survivors.⁷⁰ There are also abundant incidents involving migrants abandoned by smugglers after they run out of fuel, become lost, or anticipate border controls or actions by authorities. Many undocumented migrants, such as those whose asylum applications are rejected in destination countries, also face exclusions from the welfare states and risk detention and even deportation. Some may desire to return to their homeland but never return as they fear social exclusion and the stigma attached to returning empty handed. Nevertheless, while many potential migrants told me that they were aware of all these risks related to migration, they associate the failure with an individual's bad luck; they therefore want to try their chances despite high probabilities of encountering disaster during and after migration. Thus, the successes of former migrants and remittances play a dual role in current migration decisions by influencing young people to aspire for migration while simultaneously becoming a source of information on how to exit and pay *delaloch* to organize journeys.

Even in popular culture, Ethiopian pop stars have begun praising—though some musicians and Ethiopian films discourage migration, at times presenting it in harsh language, such as equating migration with betraying one's homeland⁷¹—the youth who sacrifice their time and energy to migrate and support their family left behind by sending remittance. Solomon Addis Getahun has analyzed popular song lyrics and found within them the recurring use of *sidet*, a term traditionally used for international migration and synonymous with exile.⁷² However, in recent years, particularly after the

69 MMC, "Quarterly Mixed Migration Update."

70 IOM, "Journey from Africa to Yemen Remains World's Busiest Maritime Migration Route" (14 February 2020), accessed December 25, 2020, <https://www.iom.int/news/journey-africa-yemen-remains-worlds-busiest-maritime-migration-route>.

71 Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility"; Belloni, "Cosmologies of Destinations."

72 Solomon Addis Getahun, "Sedet, Migration and Refugeecism as Portrayed in Ethiopian Song Lyrics," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 15, no. 2/3 (2006): 341–59.

1990s, international migration (mainly to the western world) has been associated with cosmopolitanism, remittance, and changing socioeconomic conditions of the families left behind. For instance, “Iyeyem iskista” (Wailing and Dancing), a song by Tewodros Kassahun—an Ethiopian pop star singer popularly known as Teddy Afro—details how young people will do anything to leave the country to change their lives and those left behind by sending remittances. The lyrics also touch upon the gains and losses of migration, such as the shame associated with returning empty-handed.⁷³

Abye Tassé’s work has pointed to public perceptions and identified popular terms used in contemporary Ethiopia to describe the current migration journey and migrants’ lives abroad.⁷⁴ The first emic notion “diaspora” refers to those living in Western countries and is perceived as those with successful careers and life accomplishments. The second term is “Tora Bora,” a mountain in Afghanistan that is difficult to reach and used to refer to the hardships experienced by migrants attempting to cross the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea or take other dangerous paths to Europe. The third concept, *Lame Bora*, refers to those who could not migrate and are left behind and is borrowed from a traditional tale for children in Ethiopia.⁷⁵ The tale narrates the last words of a poor and dying mother who begs her milk cow, the only thing left behind she could trust, to nourish her two children if her husband marries another woman, presuming that the stepmother would most probably abuse her children and deny them food.⁷⁶

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopian diaspora policy discourses, popular culture, domestic media, and the film industry celebrate and circulate stories about the gains of migration, mainly diasporic remittances, and “knowledge and skill transfers” to Ethiopia.⁷⁷ As Tassé notes, those who have settled in the West are regarded as the “successful ones” and seen as the diaspora, while those en route are viewed as struggling to become diasporans and those left behind are stuck and have less chances for social mobility and labeled *Lame Bora*. Finding themselves within these public discourses on migration, young people not only hope and aspire for international migration but also make mass overland exits and struggle to reach and settle in destinations such as South Africa, Europe, and Saudi Arabia.

73 Ibid., 353–56.

74 Tassé, “My New Filipino is an Ethiopian.”

75 Ibid., 96–97.

76 For greater detail on other concepts and local terms used to explain the complicated migration processes of young people in Ethiopia, it is also worth consulting de Regt and Tafesse, “Deported”; Zewdu, “Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration”; and Adugna, “Migration Patterns and Emigrants’ Transnational Activities.”

77 Getahun, “Sedet, Migration and Refugeeism”; Kuschminder and Siegel, “Determinants of Diaspora policy.”

The Decline of Values of Education

In Ethiopia, modern education used to be a means of improving social status, as it was supposed to generate the knowledge necessary for “progress” and “modernity” as well as employment and income.⁷⁸ It was also a source of hope for poor parents that their educated children would guarantee them shelter and survival in their old age. Recently, however, international migration and remittances are becoming more attractive than education in Ethiopia. While unemployment is an enormous problem for young people in Ethiopia, what is of greater concern to Ethiopians is the precarious lives of educated public servants, who largely receive monthly salaries of less than US\$ 200 and whose living costs are currently skyrocketing due to increasing inflation.

Tesfaye Semela and Logan Cochrane examined why young people in southern Ethiopia terminate their education to migrate out of the country, mainly to South Africa.⁷⁹ They discovered that young people’s decisions to terminate school in order to migrate are in fact collective decisions made by the individual, parents, members of the extended family, and the community as well as the macro-level social reality represented by the national socioeconomic and political context. They argue that education failed to maintain its ability to create cultural capital and, in turn, economic capital. Migration started to replace the hope of education, such as helping oneself and improving family through remittances that had traditionally been promised by successful college education. Instead, the community realized that while university graduates get unemployed for years, rural families begin to rely on incomes sent home by less-educated migrant members of the household. Semela and Cochrane also identified that the labor market in major destinations such as South Africa and Gulf States does not require advanced education and skills:

In most cases, those migrants were destined for South Africa (usually male) and tended to be employed in ethnic businesses or become street vendors often as part of a network of a common social or ethnic origin. Similarly, migrants to Middle Eastern countries (mostly females) usually end up working as housemaids. For potential migrants, therefore, getting education more than TVET Certificate (Grade 10 + 1 or Grade 10 + 2) to secure their driving license as evidence for possessing the required skills in the destination does not make much difference in terms wage differentials.

78 Mains, *Hope is Cut*; Zewdu, “Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration.”

79 Tesfaye Semela and Logan Cochrane, “Education—Migration Nexus: Understanding Youth Migration in Southern Ethiopia,” *Education and Sciences* 9, no. 77 (2019): 1–15.

This is because they would be employed in areas that do not require more than basic literacy and numeracy.⁸⁰

In many parts of Ethiopia parents grow frustrated as they witness not just that the college-educated youth cannot find gainful employment but also that the salaries for public officials could not feed their recipients let alone help their parents as well. People who engage in informal economies and take on low-status jobs—such as street vendors, taxi drivers, coffee sellers on street corners, shoe shiners, and waitresses and waiters—can generate better incomes than some professional public servants, such as government health extension workers and primary school teachers with Degree and Diploma certificates.⁸¹ Studies show that even employed young members of the community, including teachers and civil servants, have started to migrate to South Africa and the Gulf States, where they are engaged as domestic workers and daily laborers and many migrants who undertake perilous journeys to Europe are university graduates.⁸²

The Roles of the State, Private Employment Agencies, and Brokers

The promotion of labor exports as a route to generating remittances has become one of Ethiopia's top foreign policy agendas and a key element in the different phases of the five-year national development programs.⁸³ By adapting circular migration management models and policies from experienced Asian countries such as the Philippines, the Ethiopian government is playing a triple role in migrant deployment: (1) setting up rules, regulations, and institutions that govern the activities of Private Employment Agencies (PEAs);⁸⁴ (2) signing bilateral labor agreements with receiving countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the UAE; (3) directly engaging in the process of recruitment and deployment of workers in receiving countries that have bilateral agreements with the Ethiopian state. As such, the government functions both as a migration merchant and regulator. In this process, more

80 Ibid., 12–13.

81 Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility."

82 Tekalign, Adugna, and Deshingkar, "Social Embeddedness of Human Smuggling"; Semela and Cochrane, "Education—Migration Nexus."

83 Ayalew, "Struggle for Mobility."

84 Ethiopia's Overseas Employment Proclamation No. 923/2016 set requirements, procedures, and steps of Ethiopian overseas labour deployments in Gulf States and elsewhere. It also stipulates how PEAs can recruit, transport, harbor, and deploy domestic and other workers in the Middle East.

than six hundred PEAs have been established in Ethiopia since the ban was lifted in 2018, many of which have branch offices in countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

In Ethiopia, a large proportion of PEAs are concentrated in Addis Ababa. But over the past few years, the source of migrant labor has expanded from urban centers to small towns and rural villages, which have become emerging sources of low-skilled labor for the international labor market in Middle East countries. This is partly due to the expansion of recruiting agents into regional towns. There are also PEAs in GCC countries that are independent from those based in Ethiopia, but which recruit and deploy migrant workers in Ethiopia.

PEAs use diverse strategies and work with brokers to facilitate labor migration from Ethiopia. Informal brokers in Ethiopia (*delala*) recruit migrants in villages and towns throughout the country, guide migrants in handling phone interviews with potential employers, access government documents, obtain medical certificates, organize transportation, arrange employment contracts, and obtain visas.⁸⁵ These processes indicate the blurred boundaries between formal and informal, legal and illegal, and state and market, as migrants and brokers use various strategies while operating under the umbrella of labor mobility provisions. Ethiopian labor mobility abroad is thus organized and mediated by a range of state and private actors, legal frameworks, material and technological infrastructures, as well as brokering and social networks.

Labor migration from Ethiopia to the Middle East is thus on the rise. This follows both from programs developed by the Ethiopian government and increasing demand from GCC countries because of lower costs for African compared to Asian workers.⁸⁶ Between 2009 and 2014 nearly half a million Ethiopian labor migrants entered GCC countries, most commonly Saudi Arabia and the UAE as well as Lebanon, of whom more than 90 percent were young women, mainly less educated, unmarried, and Muslim.⁸⁷ More recently, there has been a further rise of documented Ethiopian migration to the Middle East. An estimated 150,000 Ethiopian migrant domestic workers annually entered the UAE between 2014 and 2017 using the services of PEAs based there. Despite Saudi Arabian deportations of Ethiopian migrants in recent years, the vast majority of deportees

85 Kfale and Zerihun, "Ethiopian Labor Migration"; Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration."

86 Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration," 18.

87 De Regt and Tafesse, "Deported"; Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration."

remigrated, mainly to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, using the services of informal brokers and PEAs.⁸⁸

Brokers, known locally as *delaloch*, not only engage in formal labor recruitment and deployment in Gulf States, but they also facilitate smuggling organizations and clandestine overland journeys of Ethiopian migrants towards South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Europe.⁸⁹ Migrants making land journeys to Saudi Arabia take the eastern route, traveling through Djibouti and Somalia and on to Yemen. Migrants achieve these long overland journeys thanks to collective, accumulated, and improvised forms of knowledge and resources that are acquired, developed, and shared by those in transit and their communities in various migration locations.⁹⁰ These knowledge and resources include information for prospective migrants about routes, smugglers, timings, how to behave during interactions with smugglers, how to hide money, which clothes, medicine, and food to carry, and where to find shelter and temporary employment in transit countries.

Migration Barriers, Return, and Remigration

The growing ambitions for international migration in Ethiopia coincide with migration security discourses and powerful border regimes on the receiving side.⁹¹ In the wake of increasing xenophobia, economic crises seriously affecting destination countries, and increasing threats of terrorism or global religious radicalism, migration and border controls have become more restrictive in Europe, Gulf States, South Africa, and the US.⁹² There is a growing tendency of relating “migration and refugee crises” in the Mediterranean regions to national security threats, with European states viewing it as an “invasion,” a welfare burden, and a channel for terrorist intrusions.⁹³ In fact, European borders have penetrated deep into African territories and begun collaborating with African states, including dictatorial regimes, to not only impede the migration of Africans to Europe but also drastically alter well-established regional population movements within Africa.⁹⁴ In recent years, therefore, migrants and brokers in Ethiopia have

88 Zewdu, “Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration.”

89 Ibid., 10–20.

90 Tekalign Ayalew, “Refugee Protections from Below: Smuggling in the Eritrea–Ethiopia Context,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 676, no. 1 (2018): 57–76.

91 Belloni, “Refugees as Gamblers,” 105–10.

92 Ayalew, “Struggle for Mobility.”

93 Kleist, “Introduction,” 20–28.

94 Belloni, “Refugees as Gamblers”; Kleist, “Introduction.”

had to struggle to redirect migration pathways in novel ways to look for new south–south and south–east migration pathways towards South Africa and the Middle East, respectively, as an alternative to migration routes to Europe.

Depriving formal channels of mobility across social and territorial spaces in the era of “global interconnections” has forced much of the youth from Ethiopia to find alternative informal, dynamic, and defiant means of mobility at the expense of their own lives.⁹⁵ Moreover, dynamic informal migration facilitating infrastructures (brokers, families, networks, and diasporic and communication technologies) have developed to fill this gap between expectations and opportunities of migration and mobility. Migrants do not simply run away from their homelands or stay in transition spaces. Rather, migration is a time-consuming process that encompasses careful planning, generating and sharing knowledge, involving multiple transitions across geographic, social, and legal borders until they settle in destination countries. While the decision to migrate and the journeys undertaken are individual life projects, however, they are embedded in, informed, and organized by former migrations and transnational social formations.

After arriving at a destination or crossing the borders, new challenges await migrants: a new and unfamiliar country, language barriers and bureaucratic procedures related to asylum seeking, as well as work and resident permits. Many migrants cannot meet the stricter conditions of getting refugee status or work and resident permits and remain undocumented, which means being exposed to the risk of detention and deportation. In recent years, Ethiopian migrants have experienced mass deportations from Gulf States, particularly from Saudi Arabia, and many were deported from Lebanon due to economic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2013 and 2016, Saudi Arabia deported 160,000 clandestine Ethiopian migrants; yet many of these deportees remigrated to the Gulf States due to the stigma associated with returning empty-handed combined with the inefficacy of the Ethiopian government’s social and economic reintegration programs.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Youth migration to international destinations is the result of combinations of external driving factors, intermediate facilitating conditions, and individual aspirations that lead to actual decisions and exits. Young migrants are not just autonomous, male, rational calculating subjects. Their migration is driven

95 Belloni, “Cosmologies of Destinations”; Ayalew, “Struggle for Mobility.”

96 De Regt and Tafesse, “Deported.”

by the entanglement of broader social, economic, and political processes as well as their lived experiences of all of these. Their migration aspirations are shaped by and are embedded in the historical contexts and structural challenges in contemporary Ethiopia and their migration pathways are facilitated by different infrastructures. Despite the efforts of the Ethiopian government to introduce a number of top-down technocratic developmental projects, poverty remains rampant and there are growing economic inequalities, limited job opportunities, sky rocketing costs of living, and political repressions, all of which have destroyed and continue to destroy young people's hope, increasing their sense of uncertainty.⁹⁷ In other words, high growth rates have been accompanied by increasing poverty, inequality, informality, and precarity.

We might therefore ask what it means to be a young person in this situation in contemporary Ethiopia. A young person's vulnerabilities and aspirations are partly shaped by the continuation of historical crises such as political instability, environmental disasters, and demographic pressures. In the context of uncertainties due to limited life choices and volatile political conditions, many young people are unable to fulfill personal life projects and family expectations, including stable income, marriage, and starting one's own family. With the expansion of interconnections to global systems and access to information on unequal world and consumption patterns, limited access to formal migration channels, as well as daily flows of diasporic remittances, young people have begun feeling deprived and excluded from global connections. Moreover, everyday media, state policy, popular culture, public debates, and discourses on migration to the West and on the Ethiopian diaspora concern themselves with the high levels of wealth, consumption, cosmopolitanism, and knowledge and the large remittances that significantly shape young people's hopes and motivations to migrate to the prosperous North and South.

The youth engage in multiple migratory exit strategies, such as overland journeys, obtaining labor visas for the Gulf States, or using family and student visas to move to western countries. All these are supported and exploited by different actors, including diasporans, brokers, smugglers, and the Ethiopian state. The Ethiopian state is not just a push factor in emigration—by virtue of its failings. Rather, it is an active agent that both directly and indirectly facilitates migration from Ethiopia. Indeed, thanks to its diaspora policies, legal frameworks, and overseas labor recruitment agencies, the state has positioned itself as the migration mediator, merchant, and regulator, becoming the main driver of youth emigration.

97 Zewdu, "Ethiopian Female Domestic Labor Migration"; Mains, *Hope is Cut*.

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- . "Ethiopia National Displacement Report Round 18: July–August 2019." Accessed December 25, 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/DTM%20Ethiopia%20R18%20National%20Displacement%20Report%20v5.pdf>.
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Part Three

Transnational Experiences:
Connections, Disjunctures,
and Ambivalent
Belongings

Chapter 9

Mahbereseb

Traditional Community-Based Mechanisms and Responses that Support and Facilitate the Health and Well-Being of Ethiopian Immigrants in Canada

Mary Goitom

Introduction

Approximately 20 percent of Canada's population are immigrants.¹ Along with Eritrea, Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria, Ethiopia has become one of the primary countries sending immigrants to Canada. As a result, a growing Ethiopian immigrant community is beginning to form a significant diaspora within the Canadian population. Immigrant economic integration has become a key government priority;² however, the processes of immigration and settlement are inherently stressful, and therefore integration necessitates that the psychosocial well-being of immigrants be considered. As one of the largest groups of African immigrants to Canada, Ethiopians address well-being for the most part by opting to utilize and contribute to communal mechanisms in their diasporic community that support health and well-being. For Ethiopians, health is derived both from a state of equilibrium within the body and a balance between the individual and the external

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- 1 Statistics Canada, *2016 Census Program: National Household Survey* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2016).
 - 2 Kenise Kilbride, ed., *Immigrant Integration: Research Implications for Future Policy* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2014).

world.³ Communal mechanisms are integral in settlement and integration because, being aligned with Ethiopians' traditional social roots, they attend to their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being, which are disrupted as a result of migration.

This chapter will explore the ways in which a series of communal mechanisms—the forming of a diasporic community, the establishment of religious institutions within that community, *Mehaber*⁴ (a collection of individuals with a common interest or identity that meet regularly) and *Iddir* (informal insurance)—exist as systems of support that offset the mental health risk factors associated with migration and integration. This exploration focuses on how these practices are shaped by the ways in which their well-being is threaded between their homeland and the host country through their interactions with transnational social fields. This chapter will discuss how these multidimensional (social to economic) communal mechanisms organize well-being, and how well-being is symbiotically organized by community. This chapter has important implications for: (a) how well-being is conceptualized, understood, and practiced cross-culturally in settlement and integration work; (b) the way well-being, as lived through community practices, structures responses that support further well-being; and (c) how cultural mental health interventions can be advanced through community mental health approaches that conceptualize community as transnational. Last, readers should note that there is not a one-dimensional story of the Ethiopian immigration experience. This work acknowledges the complicated, nuanced, and diverse experiences that make up the Ethiopian immigrant story and, as such, this chapter presents one aspect of a vital part of diaspora life seldom researched.

Ethiopians in Canada: A Brief Overview

The past four decades have seen a substantial flow of migrants from the Horn of Africa to the West. Bariagaber characterizes the period between 1978 and 1995 as the apex of the refugee flow from the Horn of Africa, which was a result of conflicts in Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan, the Red Terror in

3 Nicole M. Monteiro and Shyngle Kolawole Balogun, "Perceptions of Mental Health in Ethiopia: A Profile of Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices among Community Members, Healthcare Workers and Traditional Healers," *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health* 7, no. 3 (2013): 259–72; Richard M. Hodes, "Cross-Cultural Medicine and Diverse Health Beliefs: Ethiopians Abroad," *Western Journal of Medicine* 166, no. 1 (1997): 29–36.

4 *Mehaber* is the institution while *Mahbereseb* describes the community in it.

Ethiopia, and intervention in domestic conflicts by external powers.⁵ Before these conflicts in the Horn, African migration to Canada was miniscule, with only sixty-five Ethiopians arriving in Canada prior to the 1980s.⁶ During those years of conflict, early immigrants from Ethiopia were largely refugees, who were for the most part selected outside of Canada and brought into the country under the UN Geneva Conventions, with permanent residence status in place.⁷ In later years, many entered Canada by individual private sponsorship under the “family class” category. After the chaos that sparked migration in the 1970s and 1980s, somewhat unstable political circumstances and poverty due to globally rising living standards have continued to compel outward migration from Ethiopia to this day. Factors for out-migration are thus not only the result of internal conflicts but are also exacerbated by people migrating to “improve their economic prospects, ensure a more secure living environment, re-unite with their family members, or avoid persecution in their country of origin.”⁸ Given this, migration involves economic and political dimensions that encapsulate local communities and the individual. Ethiopian migration, then, is a result of protracted conflicts, widespread human rights abuse, and a desire for economic betterment.⁹ At present, seventy thousand people of Ethiopian origin live in the Greater Toronto Area.¹⁰

Settlement and Well-being

The migration of people is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a migrant is “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of: (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is

5 Assefaw Bariagaber, *Conflict and the Refugee Experience: Flight, Exile and Repatriation in the Horn of Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

6 Michael Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Inequality in the City of Toronto: An Analysis of the 1996 Census* (Toronto: Department of Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2000).

7 Atsuko Matsuoaka and John Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

8 Martin Kahanec and Klaus F. Zimmermann, *Migration and Globalization: Challenges and Perspectives for the Research Infrastructure* (Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labour, 2008), 2.

9 Bariagaber, *Conflict and the Refugee Experience*.

10 Statistics Canada, *2016 Census Program*.

voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.”¹¹ Although sometimes the lines of demarcation between forced and voluntary migration are not clear cut, a distinction between the two must be made. Forced migration denotes that “people have been forced to flee their homes to seek refuge elsewhere.”¹² Reasons for such departures include and are not limited to war, natural disasters, and persecution. Conversely, voluntary migration implies that one is leaving one’s home according to one’s free will in search of greener pastures elsewhere. Examples include economic migration due to prospects of higher wages and better employment opportunities. In essence, this is one of the primary means of escaping the domestic social and political situations in migrants’ home countries.¹³

Against this backdrop, the push (i.e., poverty, population growth, war, political repression) and pull (i.e., demand for labor, better economic opportunities, social ties, and political freedom) factors for migration are intertwined, thus making it difficult to clearly distinguish between forced and voluntary migrants. For instance, in the case of voluntary migrants, their economic reasons for migrating could be precipitated by the effects that war and political repression have generated in their home countries. Therefore, people may not be employed, or, if they are, their earnings may not be sufficient to care for themselves and their families. As a result, they and their families may be existing under harsh living and working conditions. As such, their reasons for migrating in search of better opportunities, though it may appear voluntary, are open to question given that in such circumstances decisions are made under duress, and especially in cases where they may face pressure by their own family to migrate in order to earn an income that can be sent back to the family for their survival. Therefore, reasons to migrate may differ; however, “even if differences between the two categories are probably smaller,” the point is that “the same migrating individual may fall in one or the other category at the same time.”¹⁴ The push and pull

11 International Organization for Migration, “Key Migration Terms,” accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

12 Marie Norredam, “Migration and Health: Exploring the Role of Migrant Status through Register-Based Studies,” *Danish Medical Journal* 62, no. 4 (2015): 4.

13 Kassahun Habtamu, Abebaw Minaye, and Waganesh A. Zeleke, “Prevalence and Associated Factors of Common Mental Disorders among Ethiopian Migrant Returnees from the Middle East and South Africa,” *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health* 17, no. 144 (2017): 1–11.

14 Francesco Castelli, “Drivers of Migration: Why Do People Move?,” *Journal of Travel Medicine* 25, no. 1 (2018): 2.

factors explored here can, for the most part, be attributed to Ethiopians in the diaspora.

Migration for Ethiopians, then, not unlike their counterparts, is a multifaceted experience that extends beyond a geographical relocation; rather, it wreathes a complex and dynamic interplay that encompasses environmental, economic, cultural, and social processes of change. In such instances, it is not uncommon for migrants to face a variety of pre-migratory, migratory, and post-migratory stressors. Such stressors have the potential to have lasting effects on their mental health and can therefore potentially interfere with successful integration.¹⁵ A case in point is the triple trauma incurred in the process before, during, and after migration, along with the displacement and exclusion experienced within local contexts of reception (i.e., social and marginal socioeconomic positions), which further impinges on migrants' process of acculturation mainly because this triple trauma can impede their well-being and subsequent ability to achieve goals for success in the host country.¹⁶ A good illustration of this is found in work by Haile Fenta, Ilene Hyman, and Sean Rourke, whose findings reveal that for Ethiopians in Toronto the relentless and considerable association between stressful post-migration life events and somatic symptoms "supports the post-migration stress hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of acculturation or settlement stress as a social determinant of immigrant health."¹⁷

Principally, the shifting from "there" to "here" "inevitably juxtaposes two kinds of "places" and "identities" with one another creating, in the process, "spaces of friction" and conflict between the resident population and the newcomers.¹⁸ In essence, how newcomers fit into the new society is to an extent determined by the nature and magnitude of this "conflict," or how difference is conceived. Up until the outbreak of conflicts in the Horn of Africa, as summarized above, African migration to Canada was miniscule. This changed in the 1970s, when the turmoil resulted in countries from the Horn, along with Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria, becoming the countries of

15 Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy, *"The Road Less Travelled": Mental Health Research with Africans in the Diaspora* (London: SAGE, 2018).

16 Mary Goitom, "'Living in Our Own World': Parental Influence on the Identity Development of Second-Generation Ethiopian and Eritrean Youth during Their Formative Years," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17, no. 4 (2016): 1163–80.

17 Haile Fenta, Ilene Hyman, and Sean B. Rourke, "Somatic Symptoms in a Community Sample of Ethiopian Immigrants in Toronto, Canada," *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health* 3, no. 1 (2010): 10.

18 Ransford Danso, "From 'There' to 'Here': An Investigation of the Initial Settlement Experiences of Ethiopian and Somali Refugees in Toronto," *GeoJournal* 5 (2001): 3.

origin for most of the African newcomers in Canada. Up until this point, overt “racist laws restricted African immigrants, and those who did arrive during the 1960s were mainly students and members of elite classes.”¹⁹

Despite the presence of Africans in Canada since the seventeenth century, they have been largely invisible in the dominant narratives that construct the topography of Canadian history.²⁰ In the 1970s, the newcomers from Africa challenged “the commonsense, hegemonic notion of Canada” as a “pale or colorless society.”²¹ Ethiopian immigrants and refugees were a new and relatively unknown addition to Canadian society, and made up a large proportion of the newcomers who arrived from Africa during this period. Host societies typically see newcomers unfavorably, especially racialized newcomers from countries without historical immigration ties. Migrants tend to be viewed with anxiety, curiosity, and at times disdain.²² Such views “exhibited in both policy and practice make it difficult for newcomers to integrate smoothly into the host society, resulting in experiences of oppression, marginalisation, and a sense of alienation.”²³ As a result, the Ethiopian experience of settlement has been one wherein, as newcomers, they “were compelled to re-examine and sometimes modify their own ethnic and national identities,”²⁴ because who they were did not neatly fit the traditionally held assumptions about Canadian identity and how its “other” is understood.

For instance, the literature suggests that immigrants typically bring with them a strong sense of their native culture and its accompanying customs.²⁵ At the same time, research has noted that immigrants’ identity development

19 Matsuoka and Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows*, 14.

20 Matsuoka and Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows*, 14.

21 Matsuoka and Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows*, 14.

22 John Richardson, *Analyzing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

23 Mary Goitom, “The Epistemological Significance of Tizita and Sam-ennä warq in Understanding the Return-Thinking Processes and Psychological Wellbeing among Ethiopian Migrants in Toronto, Ontario,” *The International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 146.

24 Matsuoka and Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows*, 14.

25 Mary J. Levitt, Jonathan. D. Lane, and Jerome Levitt, “Immigration Stress, Social Support, and Adjustment in the First Post-Migration Year: An Intergenerational Analysis,” *Research in Human Development* 2 (2005): 159–77; Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Oksana Yakushko, “Stress and Coping Strategies in the Lives of Recent Immigrants: A Grounded Theory Model,” *International Journal of Advanced Counselling* 32 (2010): 256–73.

tends to adhere to the alternation model of acculturation.²⁶ My own research, for example, finds that the development of Ethiopian immigrants' identity is comprised of moderate selective acculturation strategies as a means to balancing the traditions of their ancestral origins pragmatically with that of their current geographical location.²⁷ In practice, as I have written elsewhere, Ethiopian immigrants "steadfastly hold on to core values such as religion, esteem for family connectedness and pride, and food preferences at home whilst thoughtfully attuning to dress and interaction etiquette within the larger Canadian social/institutional settings in order to achieve career success in the host society."²⁸ This is consistent with scholarship that purports that positive psychological outcomes for immigrants are related to their ability to retain a strong identification with both their native group and the host society.²⁹

Well-being is thus a necessary component of successful immigrant integration into the host society. One of the coping strategies employed by Ethiopians is the attempt to recreate their cultures in the country of settlement as a way to address the changes in their lives. Communal mechanisms that consist of the forming of a diasporic community, the establishment of religious institutions within that community, and the founding of community associations known as *Mehaber* and *Iddir* exist as systems of support that offset the mental health risk factors associated with migration and integration.

Diasporic Community, *Iddir*, and *Mehaber*

Along with pre-migration factors, understanding migrants' immediate and post-arrival experiences of settlement is instrumental in gaining valuable insight into the complex and often lengthy process of integration and settlement in the host country. Ethiopians' factors for out-migration, much like their immigrant counterparts who come to Canada, are replete with experiences before and during migration that constitute salient risks and stressors to their overall well-being. These include family separation, witnessing violence, war, and torture, displacement (within and outside of the country of

26 Teresa LaFromboise, Hardin L. K. Coleman, and Jennifer Gerton, "Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory," *Psychological Bulletin* 114, no. 3 (1993): 395–412.

27 Goitom, "Living in Our Own World."

28 Goitom, "Living in Our Own World," 1165.

29 Jean S. Phinney et al., "Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective," *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 3 (2001): 493–510.

origin), and economic hardship during flight, which culminate in feelings of worry, depression, and sadness—all of which stand to undermine their psychosocial well-being. Upon arrival, post-migration factors in the context of resettlement, such as “experiences of poverty, interracial conflict, family instability, parental psychosocial distress, intergenerational conflict” and unemployment/underemployment,³⁰ compound and add to the distress experienced before and during flight. For the most part, scholarship demonstrates that in the settlement process migrants tend to highlight the positive aspects of their lives prior to migration. In particular, they make strong references to “the strong family and community bonds and supports” that they had; “to this extent, leaving family and community behind to come to Canada appear to have serious emotional impacts on migrants.”³¹ The community-based strategy used by newcomers, such as Ethiopians, of recreating their culture in the country of settlement creates a pan-Ethiopian subculture that allows for a comfortable and familiar environment within the host country. While the recreation of tight-knit communities does not exclude the existing divisions and differences along religious, political, and ethnic lines that manifest and are brought with them from their home country, the strong social support systems that emulate the extended family systems left behind in their countries of origins act, in essence, as a protective mechanism against social isolation and offer community life and safety.³²

Developing social connections in the host country is not the only means by which Ethiopians are able to maintain their identities and subsequently make sense of their new environments. Contrary to what traditional assimilationist theories profess, Ethiopians do not necessarily sever ties with their ancestral homeland; rather, increasing numbers of immigrants engage in transnational consciousness (i.e., multilocality) in hopes of maintaining their identity through transnational acts, which include sustaining political, economic, religious, and social ties with their country of origin.³³ Recreating

30 Ruth Marie Wilson, Rabea Murtaza, and Yogendra B. Shakya, “Pre-Migration and Post-Migration Determinants of Mental Health for Newly Arrived Refugees in Toronto,” *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens* (2010): 47.

31 Wilson, Murtaza, and Shakya, “Pre-Migration and Post-Migration Determinants,” 47.

32 Michael Woolcock, “Social Capital and Economic Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework,” *Theory and Society* 27, no. 2 (1998): 151–208.

33 Matsuoka and Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows*; Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters, *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002); Sutama Ghosh and Lu Wang, “Transnationalism and Identity: A Tale of Two Faces and Multiple Lives,” *The Canadian Geographer* 27, no. 3 (2003): 269–82.

the community in their new place of settlement, along with engaging in transnational acts, solidifies social networks among immigrants that “may produce tangible resources, social capital, and emotional support that may offset some of the alienating and stressful effects of immigration.”³⁴ Transnationalism occurs on a variety of levels, ranging from cultural and familial to political and economic. Thus, in addition to “enhancing social cohesion and a sense of social support, transnational ties may also help immigrants to consolidate their ethnic identity at a time when they may find a number of different identities suddenly thrust upon them.”³⁵ Recreating community and maintaining transnational connections creates space for belonging and consolidating psychosocial well-being despite experiences of fragmentation and dispersal.

Along these lines, Ethiopians transnationally establish traditional practices such as *Iddirs* in the host society as a means of consolidating their well-being. *Iddirs* belong to a rich tradition of endemic community-based voluntary associations established to provide mutual aid to address community concerns. Primarily designed to provide reciprocal assistance in matters of burial and bereavement, *Iddirs* have evolved over time to become proxies for social institutions that assess the social impact of community problems, and act as one of the means by which to provide collective responses to social issues. In the Ethiopian context, their functions include, among others, organizing members in “establishing and maintaining good relationships” internally, “coordinating members for community sanitation and crime prevention, organizing and carrying out development projects,” and “help[ing] unemployed members.”³⁶

For Ethiopians in Canada, *Iddirs* are paramount to withstanding the financial and psychosocial struggles that come with migration and settlement. *Iddirs* have evolved from a monofunctional to a multifunctional network over time to accommodate the primary purpose of helping Ethiopians in times of trouble. In the diaspora, they are initiated as a response to the welfare of the community. *Iddirs* come about based on the needs identified by members of the community, by way of discussion, experience, or observation. A meeting or a gathering is called to explore whether or not an *Iddir*

34 Eleanor J. Murphy and Ramaswami Mahalingam, “Transnational Ties and Mental Health of Caribbean Immigrants,” *Journal of Immigrant Health* 6, no. 4 (2004): 170.

35 Murphy and Mahalingam, “Transnational Ties and Mental Health of Caribbean Immigrants,” 170.

36 Alula Pankhurst and Damen Haile Mariam, “The Iddir in Ethiopia: Historical Development, Social Function, and Potential Role in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control,” *Northeast African Studies* 7, no. 2 (2000): 44.

is required based on the issue or potential need at hand, and through this membership is established.

For instance, *Iddirs* can be established as a result of informal conversations between community members who share a common concern of a particular social issue they have observed or are experiencing themselves as causing difficulties in the community. This can include and is not limited to issues such as community members experiencing financial constraints in their ability to afford after-school tutoring for their children. In this instance, one of the concerns could be that parents are timorous about the overall educational advancement of their children and furthermore how their non-academic engagement after school could leave their children exposed to falling prey to problematic influences (i.e., toxic substances, neighborhood gangs). Such concerns can be distressing to the overall well-being of the household. A meeting can be called by observers or by those who themselves may be experiencing such difficulties for an informal gathering to discuss such problems and determine if the establishment of an *Iddir* can be one of the mechanisms by which to address the issue. The call for a general gathering would be open-ended in nature by inviting not only those who are experiencing said concerns but also members of the community for whom this may not be an issue but nevertheless would like to participate in ways that would bring resolution to the problem. The call to participate would be advertised through local community-based channels (i.e., religious institutions, newspapers, radio, notices in various community establishments, local television advertisements). Such gatherings would take place more than once as determined by the first meeting and it is through such continued engagements between those that attend that membership is established. In this example, membership can be open to only those families experiencing such stressors or it can include those for whom this may not be an issue but who may want to share in the concern and want to lend themselves as sources of support (i.e., voluntary participation inclusive of capacity). In any case, the membership criteria are determined by each group depending on the issue, keeping in mind that issues are not accessible to everybody.³⁷

Because no one *Iddir* can address the full needs of community members, several *Iddirs* with specific functions are established. In the Ethiopian context, the many types of *Iddirs* include: community, based on locality and encompassing people who live in the same neighborhood; tribal, based on ethnic affiliations and home areas; institutional, based on workplace; friends; family, involving blood relatives, kin, or very close friends; women; youth;

37 Elias Teshome et al., "Participation and Significance of Self-Help Groups for Social Development: Exploring the Community Capacity in Ethiopia," *Springer Plus* 3, no. 189 (2014): 1–10.

church or mosque; or a coffee group.³⁸ Any of these types of *Iddirs* can also be established in the country of settlement as a mechanism to address specific needs, ranging from providing shared community support in finding employment, navigating the immigration system, schools, family challenges, including intergenerational schisms, and in groups established by women to address concerns or issues that are specific to their needs, just to name a few. Because most *Iddirs* open their doors to anyone in the community based on commonality of need, their membership structures make them among the most egalitarian and democratic of social organizations.³⁹

The social value of *Iddirs* is connected to the financial support they also provide members. Outside of the formal sector, *Iddirs* provide members with a source of credit and insurance and, as such, serve as revolving savings. Members make mandatory monthly contributions, which act as a form of social insurance, as it provides them with confidence to invest in their future. In this way, *Iddirs* render a direct service to the community both in social (interconnectedness and sense of community) and financial terms (credit facilities). *Iddirs* can be a means of offsetting the drivers of psychosocial distress associated with migration and settlement by providing members with an alternative saving and loans structure rooted in tradition, practicality, and availability, thus acting as an engine for their process of social and economic integration in the host country.⁴⁰

The rediscovery of native culture through the formation of their own communities provides a home away from home. As seen in the example of *Iddirs*, the community acts as a protective system because it is rooted in culture. This rootedness is further facilitated by the practice of religion, as it helps foster adaptation through cultural traditions that promote values, beliefs, attitudes, and an epistemology congruent with those found in their

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- 38 See Richard Pankhurst and Endreas Eshete, "Self-Help in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia Observer* 2, no. 11 (1958): 354–64; Dejene Aredo, "The Iddir: A Study of an Indigenous Informal Financial Institution in Ethiopia," *Savings and Development* 18, no. 1 (1993): 75–90; Feleke Tadele, "Iddirs in Urban Areas: Retrospect and Prospects" (paper presented at the "Workshop on the Role of Indigenous Associations and Institutions in Development, Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists," Addis Ababa, 1998).
- 39 Dejene Aredo, "The Village Economy and Indigenous Financial Institutions: Theory and Evidence from Rural Ethiopia," in *Economics of Integrated Crop and Livestock Systems in Ethiopia*, ed. Mulat Demeke and Wolday Amha (Addis Ababa: Agricultural Economics Society of Ethiopia, 1999), 227–64.
- 40 Tewodaj Mogues, "Social Networks Near and Far: The Role of Bonding and Bridging Social Capital for Assets of the Rural Poor," *Review of Development Economics* 23, no. 1 (2019): 189–210.

country of origin. Among Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo⁴¹ Christians, it is customary to have spiritual gatherings. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians “are known for their deep religiosity,” and as such, “most people’s daily lives are linked to church life, and follow the rhythms of fasting, praying, and attending church, especially on the numerous festivals that rule the calendar.”⁴² The most important lay organizations, known as *Mehabers*, are religious associations devoted to honoring a saint, for whom the association is usually named. The tradition of *Mehabers* is inherited from the Acts of the Apostles, who in Jerusalem “gathered together to eat and drink in honour of saints.”⁴³ In so doing, the Twelve Apostles were teaching religious concepts, particularly pertaining to the importance of “togetherness” and “mutual assistance in the organization of community life.”⁴⁴ *Mehabers* are organized around people who live in the same area, and the name of a *Mehaber*, and the saint it honors, tends to be inherited from the church in the vicinity.

Modelled on the Twelve Apostles, a *Mehaber* often consists of twelve members and one chairperson who is known as a “Muse” (Moses). In the Bible, Moses organized and led his people out of Egypt; in the context of the *Mehaber*, a Muse “is expected to think, feel and act like Moses.”⁴⁵ Therefore, unlike *Iddirs*, *Mehabers* are religious institutions and have no explicit economic or insurance purposes. Their function is to strengthen ties between Christians and to act as a social network helping them to support one another. There are approximately ten religious days in each month of the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar, and *Mehabers* are hosted on a Saint’s Day each month. The event is hosted by the members on a rotating basis and is held at their homes. Typically, members arrive late in the afternoon, and usually the occasion is opened and blessed with prayer by a priest. Unlike *Iddirs*, there are typically not any written rules that govern a *Mehaber*, mainly because its functions “are limited to prayers, eating and drinking, social and political discussions,” and resolving disputes among members and/or supporting members in resolving discord in their lives.⁴⁶

41 Tewahedo signifies oneness.

42 Anne Britt Flemmen and Mulumebet Zenebe, “Religious Mahbär in Ethiopia: Ritual Elements, Dynamics, and Challenges,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46 (2016): 5.

43 Getachew Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations in Resettlement Adjustment Process: A Case Study of Iqubs, Idirs and Mahabers in the Ethiopian Community in Toronto,” *Refuge* 15, no. 3 (1996): 33.

44 Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations,” 34.

45 Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations,” 34.

46 Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations,” 34.

As a social network, the purpose of a *Mehaber* is to establish and strengthen “the bond with fellow religious practitioners and establishing relationships of sisterhood and brotherhood.”⁴⁷ For example, members visit one another during times of death and bereavement, births, christenings, celebrations, and illness. This invariably fosters a strong social bond that becomes a constant in people’s everyday lives. For Ethiopians in the diaspora, these bonds are operationalized by important social functions that create a social network where members can exchange information, thus providing social insurance that is significant for their ability to settle and navigate the process of integration. A religious *Mehaber* affords its members an abundance of freedom in the practice of ritual and “can be viewed as a cultural toolbox”; and it offers people “great flexibility in adjusting it according to their needs.”⁴⁸

Ethiopia offers a broad range of traditional associations that are diverse, not just in membership size and purpose but also in importance to the communities. Given this diversity, establishing a diasporic community along the lines of their own communities in the host country and organizing communal mechanisms in their diasporic community that support a holistic approach to health and well-being act as a primary and important mechanism by which Ethiopians are actively engaged to offset the deleterious effects of migration, settlement, and integration. Organizing *Iddirs* in the diaspora as a tool to support settlement, integration, and overall well-being of community members aligns with their ubiquitous presence in their home country. Therefore, the main function of *Iddirs* is to “provide financial and in-kind support to households when a family member dies.”⁴⁹ Over time, to better accommodate their primary purpose of supporting people experiencing financial difficulties, *Iddirs* have shifted to a multifunctional network. In this way, *Iddirs* are a pan-Ethiopian collective insurance practice designed to strengthen the individual, the family, and the community. Given the particular financial difficulty a given *Iddir* seeks to address and the number of people affected that difficulty, membership size varies as agreed upon by the group whether it is practiced in their home country or in the host country. *Iddirs*, “once established, are driven by their own internal dynamics” and, “since they are member-led organizations, their activities remain continuous.”⁵⁰ In the diaspora, therefore, *Iddirs* act as a safety-net that employs “cultural practices and symbols from homeland traditions (Ethiopia) and synthesize these with local cultural and material circumstances in the host society.” They illustrate how

47 Flemmen and Zenebe, “Religious Mahbär in Ethiopia,” 21.

48 Flemmen and Zenebe, “Religious Mahbär in Ethiopia,” 21.

49 Flemmen and Zenebe, “Religious Mahbär in Ethiopia,” 24.

50 Elias Yitbarek, “The Role of Iddir in Neighbourhood Upgrading in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 41, no. 1/2 (2008): 195.

traditional cultural practices can enhance and secure the diaspora's economic security and sense of belonging (well-being).⁵¹

Mehabers are religious associations connected with Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Christians and are specifically designed to strengthen people individually. Much like their practice in Ethiopia, in the host country their intention of strengthening people is accomplished by being religious fraternal associations with specific functions to serve God (i.e., practicing service to the community), provide social networking, facilitate the exchange of information, support conflict resolution and reconciliation, and provide entertainment and social insurance (i.e., building reputation and prestige). Furthermore, compared to *Iddirs*, membership in religious *Mehabers* tends to be much smaller and, as such, seems to be more personal.⁵² These traditional institutions are not only rooted in Orthodox religious aspects of Ethiopian culture but are also "an alternative means to create a traditional safety net in Canadian society," making up for the loss that is accrued during the process of migration.⁵³

Discussion and Implications

As previously noted, the health and well-being of migrants are influenced by a number of complex and interrelated factors, with the migration and settlement process itself being "a significant social determinant of health."⁵⁴ Helping professions, like social work, are the primary arm by which the state "integrates" newcomers. In the North American context, helping professions have a long history of doing settlement work on behalf of the state, thus making them the principal producer of the "integrated immigrant" by putting theory (state policy) into practice. Consequently, they influence how migrants' lives are constructed. In particular, the helping professions that service newcomers recognize just how important the social determinants of health that shape the health and well-being of newcomers and their communities are in affecting both their mental and physical health.

Scholarship on health and mental health as it pertains to the impact of migration on the well-being of newcomers has been understood through

51 Hagar Salamon, Steven Kaplan, and Harvey Goldberg, "What Goes Around Comes Around: Rotating Credit Associations among Ethiopian Women in Israel," *African Identities* 7, no. 3 (2009): 401.

52 Flemmen and Zenebe, "Religious Mahbär in Ethiopia."

53 Mequanent, "The Role of Informal Organizations," 35.

54 Nazilla Khanlou, "Migrant Mental Health in Canada," *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens* (2010): 9–16.

three dominant approaches. The first, referred to as the morbidity-mortality hypothesis, argues that newly arrived migrants have worse health outcomes than the general population. The second approach, known as the healthy immigrant effect, infers the opposite by proposing that, in comparison to the general population, immigrants tend to have better health outcomes. Lastly, the transitional effect maintains that the health advantage that immigrants demonstrate upon arrival decreases the longer they live in the host country.

These conceptualizations and how they are practiced in cross-cultural settlement and integration work are problematic, because these foundations for understanding well-being are “predominantly based on the health and well-being of immigrants and refugees” who arrived “through mainstream migration channels.”⁵⁵ In essence, these understandings do not take into consideration the multiplicity of peoples, groups, reasons for flight, and experiences that make up the category of migrants, immigrants, or newcomers. For example, migrants without legal status invariably face additional challenges in their process of settlement and integration, as “their non-status gives them and their families limited or no access to health care, education, social services and legal rights to promote and protect their health.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, in addition to not taking a full account of their distinct pre-migration experiences, these conceptualizations do not bear in mind that, post-migration, a newcomer’s well-being can be significantly different, and yet the reasons for these differences have not been adequately examined. This chapter has attributed such differences in post-migration experiences of settlement and integration to practices embedded in Ethiopian newcomers’ community and the way they engender agency and resiliency.

The Eurocentric orientation toward how well-being is conceived, understood, and practiced also shapes the service-seeking behavior of newcomers. For instance, in the West well-being is circumscribed and realized within diagnostic classifications in a manner that communicates and orders clinical material, establishes how people are managed, treated, and cared for, and, ultimately, begins to bind people to a particular “fixed” identity.⁵⁷ Within this framework, alternative conceptions of well-being cannot come into existence. The continuing gap in how service is provided to newcomers who conceive of well-being in different terms has increased the systemic rift between helping professionals and service users to an “us” (mainstream services) and “them” (immigrant service users) divide, placing the onus on

55 Khanlou, “Migrant Mental Health in Canada,” 10.

56 Khanlou, “Migrant Mental Health in Canada,” 10.

57 Felix Attah Johnson, “African Perspectives on Mental Disorder,” in *Psychiatric Diagnosis: A World Perspective*, ed. Juan A. Mezzich, Yutaka Honda, and Marianne C. Kastrup (New York: Springer, 1994), 57–68.

immigrants to “adapt, adjust, and accept existing limitations” in the services available to them.⁵⁸ This explains why immigrants are not able to fully communicate their needs and, coupled with the tendency of service providers to discount their cultures, leads to service underutilization and mistrust, acting as a barrier to accessing services.⁵⁹

The lack of comprehension of culture-specific beliefs associated with well-being within the mental health diagnostic systems contributes to newcomers like Ethiopians in Canada choosing to transnationally reconstitute, through their community and by way of traditional practices, their beliefs, values, and normative behaviors in order to address the dislocation experienced as a consequence of migration. It is imperative to note that Ethiopia is a heterogeneous society, whose people constitute a broad range of cultures; it is therefore impossible to speak to a single Ethiopian viewpoint. However, within this diversity, it can be said that the cultures do share a consciousness of the world, and as such “they have in common a characteristic perception of life and death that makes it possible to describe their overriding philosophy.”⁶⁰ In this way, the character and effectiveness of practices that facilitate well-being for the mind and the body always and everywhere depend on the culture in which such practices are exercised. In the Canadian context, health services are often considered to be a private matter between the service provider and service user. In the Ethiopian context, however, healing practices that foster well-being are “an integral part of society and religion, a matter in which the whole community is involved.”⁶¹ Therefore, to understand how Ethiopians and others like them from the African Continent conceive well-being and its practices, practitioners have to appreciate Ethiopian ontological (the nature of reality) and epistemological (how we know what we know) perspectives and their social roots.

For Ethiopians in Canada, the formation of their community has been the process by which they have been able to reclaim the culture and identity of their country of origin: a mechanism by which practices that foster well-being are reclaimed and inscribed. This type of community-building is a form of positioning that embodies a protective system rooted in a sense of place that encapsulates their place of origin. This allows them to reclaim and register concepts such as nature, which in their understanding simultaneously

58 Rashmi Luther, “Access and Equity in Ottawa: A Snapshot of Social Service Issues, Institutional Responses and Remaining Challenges Regarding Culture, Race and Language,” *Our Diverse Cities* 4 (2007): 40.

59 Haile Fenta, Samuel Noh, and Ilene Hyman, “Mental Health Service Utilization by Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in Toronto,” *The Chicago Journal of Nervous and Mental Health* 194, no. 12 (2006): 925–43.

60 Johnson, “African Perspectives on Mental Disorder,” 57.

61 Johnson, “African Perspectives on Mental Disorder,” 57.

constitute “the physical world and the social environment of both the living and the dead, together with the metaphysical forces of the universe.”⁶² The construction of these spaces allows them to index aspects of their positioning through language and culture, and to foster adaptation through the practice of religion and cultural traditions such as *Iddirs* and *Mehabers*. These reconstructions of community positively influence Ethiopians’ recovery from pre-immigration and post-immigration stressors that often disrupt well-being.⁶³ Ethiopians’ ontological and epistemological positioning comes from their long history of traditional beliefs and practices of health. Scholarship in this area reveals that in the extensive body of Ethiopian literature on well-being, “in general, Ethiopians believe health is derived from a state of equilibrium within the body, as well as balance between the individual and external world.”⁶⁴ Migration and the process of settlement invariably create disharmony and dislocation between the individual and the environment from which they derive their sense of being. The establishment of community and the recreation of informal organizations like *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* in the newcomer adjustment process outside of mainstream Canadian institutions and structures offset the rupture of life’s harmony and are “imputed either to a material cause, instinct with an ‘intangible force’ or, directly to that intangible force itself.”⁶⁵

As a consequence, the way well-being is lived through community practices structures responses that support individual well-being. *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* create a social world for Ethiopians in the Canadian diaspora that enables them to express themselves in a manner that reflects the sociocultural context in which they live and encompasses the multidimensional nature of how well-being is conceived. For example, through these organizations, experiences of discrimination in the host country are understood as a collective experience, and shared values and traditions “generate sentiments and perspectives that serve to hold individual Ethiopians together.”⁶⁶ *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* provide the ontological and epistemological framework for social reorganization, because “leadership roles, decision-making structures, communication or interaction patterns,” and social systems are practiced in a manner compatible with their consciousness of the world and how they are in it.⁶⁷ Such social organizations generate “the dynamism that works towards creating an organic link between the individual Ethiopian and

62 Johnson, “African Perspectives on Mental Disorder,” 57.

63 See Goitom, “Living in Our Own World.”

64 Monteiro and Balogun, “Perceptions of Mental Health in Ethiopia,” 260.

65 Johnson, “African Perspectives on Mental Disorder,” 57.

66 Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations,” 35.

67 Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations,” 35.

his or her Toronto community by encouraging the idea of solidarity and helping to develop a new vision of what life in Canada is and how it should be organized.”⁶⁸ By centering social relations on fostering and maintaining well-being, these traditional practices recognize factors outside of the person that cause vulnerability to disharmony, emphasizing “the importance of cultural and social values in making sense of” and addressing dislocation.⁶⁹ As such, Ethiopians engage “in their own surroundings (developing cultural and communicative competencies in relation to these surroundings)” and also activate “wider flows and circuitries (allowing them to stay in touch with distant social realities and alternative social imaginations).”⁷⁰ In other words, what has been constructed in their local place of living cannot be separated from their continued association with their place of origin, and this has made the local transnational. *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* are facilitators of and connectors to this transnational way of living because their establishment is the primary method that undergirds the process of direction, sense-making, and belonging, and inculcates well-being.

Traditional models of practice geared toward state-sponsored concepts of “immigrant integration” have only achieved the following discursive outcomes: first, turning the gaze of the public, practitioners, politicians, and researchers away from the ways in which those labeled immigrants are members of the receiving society, which has implications for participation and belonging; and second, by placing the focus on said groups, shouldering them with the responsibility for the various long-standing social, political, and economic troubles that exist in the host society—which also has implications for participation, belonging, and well-being.⁷¹ The discourse that undergirds traditional paradigms used to explain migrant health and well-being characterizes immigrants as “needy service recipients.”⁷² Exploring helping professional practices through a transnational lens offers better insight into the fraught assimilation of practices that fail to understand the intricacies involved in migrants’ lives, because doing so historicizes the concepts of immigrant integration and well-being in neoliberal and decolonial

68 Mequanent, “The Role of Informal Organizations,” 36.

69 Monteiro and Balogun, “Perceptions of Mental Health in Ethiopia,” 260.

70 Marco Jacquemet, “Language and Transnational Spaces,” in *Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variations*, ed. Peter Auer and Jürgen Erich Schmidt (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 51.

71 Anna C. Korteweg, “The Failures of ‘Immigrant Integration’: The Gendered Racialized Production of Non-Belonging,” *Migration Studies* 5, no. 3 (2017): 428–44.

72 Laura Simich et al., “Providing Social Support for Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: Challenges and Directions,” *Journal of Immigrant Health* 7, no. 4 (2005): 265.

social relations. Grounding the field in such knowledge allows practitioners to deal competently with the phenomena that produce such complexities.

For example, traditional paradigms of practice that have been used to explain immigrant health need to be re-examined because they do not account for the resilience, agency, and resourcefulness of immigrants; thus, they omit how immigrants practice their capacity to survive and thrive in the face of tremendous challenges. A major consequence of this omission is that their community itself are misrepresented as barriers to integration because they act against immigrants becoming “real Canadians” and adopting the traditions, customs, and language that encompass “Canadian identity.”⁷³ In actuality, the establishment of community is a means of dismantling barriers to belonging (e.g., racism, stereotypes, fear, and economic disenfranchisement) and to creating a sense of “home” or “normalcy,” for example through the ability to practice traditions and customs like *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* that engender agency and well-being. Therefore, new approaches to practice would include centering client–practitioner professional relationships in an understanding of how people relocating from their “home” to achieve their “structures of desires” produces a deterritorialization of culture production, and how the reformation of community in the host country can be a viable vehicle for understanding and facilitating well-being in the settlement process.⁷⁴ Community mental health approaches that conceptualize community as transnational would begin to open up possibilities in practice that move beyond the traditional Eurocentric conceptualization of immigrants and well-being.

Conclusion

This chapter has adopted a pragmatic approach by exploring the ways in which the establishment of community allows for the reformation of communal mechanisms that support health and well-being for Ethiopians in the Canadian diaspora. When it comes to research, policy, and practice in this area, for the most part the focus tends to be on “barriers and challenges” with nominal considerations of individual and community assets (i.e., agency

73 Stephen Quinn, “Why Do So Many Canadians See Ethnic Enclaves as a Threat?” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto, ON), June 1, 2012, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/why-do-so-many-canadians-see-ethnic-enclaves-as-a-threat/article4226087/>.

74 Carola Suárez-Orozco, “Formulating Identity in a Globalized World,” in *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, ed. Marcello M. Suárez-Orozco and Desirée Baolian Qin-Hilliard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 173–202.

and resilience) and the productive outcomes that community engagements engender. Consequently, considering the Ethiopian experiences of migration, settlement, integration, and well-being, this chapter has explored how *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* as informal social organizations act as important support mechanisms for Ethiopians' adjustment processes in their host society. I noted that the traditional practices inculcate well-being by becoming the medium by which cultural and spiritual expression takes place. In particular, the implementation of *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* demonstrate the need to take into consideration the resilience, agency, and strengths that Ethiopians embody. Among others, this demonstration shifts the focus of the discussion on mental health interventions and promotion from one that characterizes immigrants as being "needy clients" to one that recognizes them as "people" who are resourceful and have the capacity to survive and thrive in challenging circumstances. Rooted in traditional Ethiopian social practices and imbued in Ethiopian epistemology, *Iddirs* and *Mehabers* attend to their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being because, for Ethiopians in the diaspora, these resources weave together the past (home) and the present (host country). They are mechanisms that enable the potential for change (i.e., social and economic) by permitting the social accompaniment that engenders it.

Although significant literature considers the mental health needs of and barriers to accessing mental health services experienced by Ethiopian immigrants, that literature tends to focus on Ethiopian migrants as immigrants and returnees from/in Israel and the Middle East. In comparison, studies of this population in North America are at their early stages. In the Canadian context, such examinations are scarce and those that exist with a specific focus on this group are dated and situational in nature (i.e., Ethiopians arriving seeking refuge from conflict), and the rest focus on this group as part of a larger study of the effects of mental health on the African diaspora; there tends to be little nuanced analysis specific to the Ethiopian experience. Moreover, mental health and well-being are not openly discussed and, not unlike other communities around the world, this could be attributed to the negative stigma associated with mental health. For this reason, a community-centered approach to research with the Ethiopian community as it pertains to well-being might be the best way to move forward, especially because the close-knit and communal nature of Ethiopian culture has the capacity to offset mental illness. Furthermore, an approach of this kind signals a shifting of the discourse on well-being from a predominantly medicalized and deficit-based approach to one that considers understanding health and well-being beyond the Eurocentric orientations of said concepts. This development could go a long way toward building trusting and efficacious relationships when conducting responsive research.

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Chapter 10

The Ethiopian Diaspora's Philanthropy toward Homeland Development

Motivations, Patterns, and Prospects

Elizabeth Chacko and Peter H. Gebre

Introduction

Diasporas can play an active role in the development of their countries of origin through financial and social remittances, investments, and skill and technology transfers (Adepoju 2008; Brinkerhoff 2008; Merz, Chen and Geithner 2007; Newland, Terrazas and Munster 2010; Zoomers, Adepoju and van Naerssen 2008). Diaspora philanthropy, which is a subset of this giving, can take multiple forms and be directed through various channels. In this chapter, we use the term philanthropy to mean “love of mankind” and to denote private acts of benevolence toward others or actions for the benefit of the common good (Toepler 2012).

Considered a social relation, philanthropy is differentiated from transfers that are tied to commercial, financial, and political gain (Schervish 1998). Flanigan defines diaspora philanthropy more precisely as something that includes “money, goods, volunteer labor, knowledge and skills, and other assets donated for the social benefit of a community broader than one’s family members, in a country or region where there is a population with whom the donor(s) have ancestral ties” (2017, 494). Although diaspora communities may participate in transnational politics through fundraising and financial and social transfers to promote mobilization, sectarianism, and hostilities

(Orjuela 2008), we examine philanthropic efforts by diaspora organizations that focus on development activities that do not appear to be associated with political gain or political parties.

Diaspora philanthropy is often collectively channeled through philanthropic intermediaries such as diaspora associations, organizations made up of immigrants that are structured around principles of commonality such as an ethnic group, geographical region of origin, or even professional background and qualifications (de Haas 2006). Such migrant organizations include hometown associations, professional societies, ethnic groups, alumni associations, diaspora foundations, and faith-based organizations, several of which also offer online giving opportunities. These intermediaries help funnel assistance from diasporans to causes in the country of origin and are especially useful to middle- and lower-income migrants whose lack of time, resources, and know-how could make it difficult to pursue projects independently in their countries of origin (Newland, Terrazas and Munster 2010; Sidel 2007).

In this chapter, we examine and analyze patterns of philanthropic giving by the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States for development in Ethiopia, and the likely impact of such philanthropy. The idea of development is complex and contested but can broadly be understood as bringing about positive change that allows individuals and societies to thrive and achieve their potential. For the purposes of this essay, we use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a scaffolding to shed light on the connections between the Ethiopian diaspora's philanthropy directed towards the homeland and its development. The SDGs are an integral part of Agenda 2030, a plan for peace and prosperity for peoples and the planet that was adopted by all United Nations Member States, including Ethiopia, in 2015. The SDGs address three interconnected areas of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental. They take a comprehensive view of development and the interactions between goals are such that the achievement of one goal enhances the ability to achieve others (United Nations 2015). As the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia embraced the SDGs and integrated them into its second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTPII) which runs through 2020 (FDRE 2017), we believe that this is a useful framework for analyzing and understanding development activities by the diaspora in Ethiopia and their likely effects.

For this study, we created a database of organizations founded by members of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States of America that engage in philanthropy directed towards development in Ethiopia. We first identified Ethiopian diaspora organizations that met this criterion that were known to us or that we discovered through contacts in the community. Community organizations founded and operated by the Ethiopian diaspora

that receive federal and state grants and were focused on charitable activities in the United States were omitted from the database. Additionally, we identified Ethiopian diaspora organizations with 501(c)(3) (tax exempt) status in the United States using Charity Navigator, a concern that evaluates the performance of not-for-profit charities and foundations. A total of 434 organizations with the word “Ethiopia” or “Ethiopian” in the title were found through Charity Navigator.

The vast majority of these organizations were of a religious nature and included Christian churches as well as Islamic mosques. Those institutions with no significant development activities in Ethiopia and those that catered only to the needs of the Ethiopian American immigrant population were excluded from our list. The diaspora in the United States is also involved via local chapters of ethnic- or tribal-based development associations, such as the Amhara Development Association, the Tigrayan Development Association Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Development Association, and the Oromia Development Association. These associations raise funds for development activities in the ethnic region to which they are affiliated, and because of their evident political and ethnic ties, such organizations were not included in this analysis. There were, however, several organizations whose core mission included active involvement in the development of Ethiopia and its peoples. These were added to our database of Ethiopian diaspora organizations that were involved in philanthropic giving for development purposes in Ethiopia.

We then examined the websites of the organizations in our database to determine their origins and focus. We investigated the vision, mission, goals or objectives, and work of thirty-six Ethiopian diaspora associations and foundations in the United States that stated on their websites that they were involved in development-related activities in Ethiopia. We conducted a content analysis of the websites to identify the major themes as well as the development focus of these organizations both in terms of target populations (geographic, ethnic, children, youth, women, elderly, etc.) and sector (education, health care, nutrition, job training, agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, environment), and analyzed how they aligned with the SDGs and the development plans of the Ethiopian government. We also searched for any information on these organizations through print and other media publications and social media sites such as Facebook.

This chapter begins with a summary of how diasporans and diaspora associations may be involved in origin country development and the role of NGOs in human and economic development in Ethiopia. This is followed by an overview of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States and an analysis of the engagement of thirty-six US-based Ethiopian diaspora associations in philanthropy and their impacts on development. The chapter concludes

with a discussion of the current and future roles of such organizations on Ethiopia's development.

Diaspora Associations, Philanthropy, and Development

Portes (2006) notes that if a diaspora is to be involved in sustained development, migrations should be cyclical/circular, whereby low-skill migrants return to their countries of origin with money saved for investment and migrant professionals engage in transnational activities that contribute to the home country's development. Typically, first-generation migrants and diasporans contribute to the development of their home villages/towns and countries by sending remittances to close and extended family members (Orozco 2005; Maimbo and Ratha 2005), by investing in businesses (Gillespie and Andriasova 2008), and setting up new businesses such as manufacturing units, and services such as health care centers, schools, and sports facilities.

Hometown Associations (HTAs) are the most studied of the intermediaries. HTAs are small voluntary associations created by immigrants from the same hometown or village, who usually live in proximity to one another. These associations provide a space for people from the same village or town to meet to express and enjoy cultural traditions. Over time, some HTAs have evolved into important philanthropic actors. They have raised funds from members and social networks and used the money to undertake charitable projects in their hometowns. They have also offered support to improve infrastructure, education, and health care as well as build religious edifices and recreation centers. Some were engaged in overall town beautification or the renovation of culturally important sites, including cemeteries. Some projects sought to promote economic development, such as through micro-enterprise investments (Adepoju, van Naerssen and Zoomers 2008; Mercer, Page and Evans 2008). HTAs are often the vehicle for matching fund schemes, such as Mexico's *Tres-por-uno para Migrantes* program, whereby every dollar of remittance money sent through a dedicated Mexican HTA is matched by a dollar from the municipal, state, and federal government in Mexico (Kijima and Gonzales-Ramirez 2012). Ethiopian diasporans are active participants in HTAs. According to a 2008 survey of eleven migrant groups in the USA, Ethiopians were noted as having the highest involvement in HTAs (Orozco and Garcia-Zanella 2009). Projects were usually selected through liaisons with the hometown and by the preferences of HTA members, while in the hometowns, projects were often coordinated by a trusted person known to an HTA member.

Alumni associations are similar to HTAs in that they are also place-based, with members belonging to the same school or university. Familiarity and trust among alumni make these associations an attractive intermediary for those in the diaspora. In a study of ethnic Nigerian physicians in the diaspora giving to the country of origin, it was found that individual doctors trusted alumni networks over the Nigerian government to facilitate contributions (Nwadiuko et al. 2016). As diasporas grow and establish roots in the country of settlement, they also sometimes form professional associations. The focus of most professional immigrant associations is to provide mutual support, a space for networking with compatriots in the profession and to provide career development opportunities for members. Some might be involved in development activities in the homeland through the transfer of equipment, short-term professional missions or involvement in research and development.

Philanthropic giving by a diaspora sometimes offers advantages over other forms of transfers, including international aid and even financial remittances from migrants living and working abroad. Diasporas are known to respond directly to humanitarian crises emanating from natural disasters in the country of origin. For example, Haitian and Filipino diaspora communities and organizations responded right away to the relief and recovery needs of their origin countries in the wake of hurricanes, typhoons, and floods (Esnard and Sapat 2011; Licuanan, Mahmoud and Steinmayr 2015). Diasporan philanthropists and organizations may choose to operate in areas that might otherwise not be on the radar of multilateral and international agencies, foundations, and NGOs (Brinkerhoff 2014). Migrants' familiarity with the legal systems, governance, and needs of a region or locality allows for more targeted transfers of money, materials, and skilled personnel so that these goods and services are better aligned with the needs of those places (Johnson 2007; Newland and Patrick 2004). Migrants are even known to contribute to the provision of public infrastructure where little exists (Iskander 2008; Newland, Terrazas, and Munster 2010).

Diaspora organizations involved in philanthropy are also more likely to have an understanding of local cultures and a better knowledge of local organizations with which to partner, so as to achieve maximum efficacy (Brinkerhoff 2011; Newland and Patrick 2004). Their effectiveness has even led to migrant associations being considered ideal partners for NGOs and international organizations working to promote development. Diaspora contributions through migrant associations may in fact be considered collective remittances, adding to the provision of public goods in the origin country (Goldring 2004). However, a downside of diaspora philanthropy is that local, regional, and national governments may abdicate the responsibility to develop certain regions and may invest less in particular sectors, believing

that the diaspora has the ability to bring about development in these areas (Brinkerhoff 2011; Vertovec 2004). Another danger is that funds raised by diaspora organizations may be channeled to incite sectarian hostilities and even violence (Orjuela 2008). The effectiveness of diaspora organizations may also be adversely affected by philanthropic amateurism (Salamon 1995) and a misalignment between community members' actual needs and the diasporans' perception of their needs (Newland, Terrazas and Munster 2010; Vertovec 2004).

Ethiopia's Development Trajectory and the role of NGOs

A nation of some 115 million people in 2020, Ethiopia is among the poorer countries in sub-Saharan Africa with a per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$856 (PRB 2020). Ethiopia's Human Development Index (HDI) value in 2018 was 0.470, positioning it at 173 out of 189 countries and territories that had been categorized for this index. However, in recent years, the annual rate of growth of its economy was one of the fastest in the continent, averaging 10 percent in 2007–08 and 2017–18, almost twice the regional average of 5.5 percent (World Bank 2019b). This strong growth is attributed to public investment and expansion in key sectors such as service (39% of GDP), agriculture (36% of GDP) and construction sectors. Higher economic growth has brought with it positive trends in poverty reduction, with the percentage of people living in poverty falling from 30 percent in 2011 to 24 percent in 2016, although areas of deep poverty remain in both urban and rural areas (UNDP 2019).

During the reign of the Marxist government led by dictator Mengistu Hailemariam, few diaspora associations were engaged in homeland development. Much of the aid that flowed into Ethiopia was through international relief agencies while some opposition groups also provided humanitarian assistance. Therefore, when the Mengistu regime was overthrown in 1991 and Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took control of the government, civil society organizations were few in number and of limited capacity in Ethiopia (Clark 2000). At this time, most assistance from the diaspora was to individuals and families.

Ethnic-based development associations, such as the Amhara Development Association, the Tigrayan Development Association, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Development Association, and the Oromia Development Association, were established in the early 1990s. These associations mobilized people from the respective ethnic regions to be development partners and were supported by contributions from membership bases in Ethiopia,

also receiving project funds from the government to carry out various development activities (Clark 2000).

When the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of the major rebel groups fighting the Mengistu government, came to power in 1991, the new government was focused on institution building in the wake of the devastation wrought by civil war and famines. It was not until 2002 that the Ethiopian government devised strategies and concrete policy instruments to encourage the flow of resources from the diaspora to the homeland. Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs and National Security Strategy of 2002 explicitly mentions that diasporans could play an active role in the country's development, particularly in the economic realm, as investors and as proponents of Ethiopian products and trade between their country of residence and country of origin (FDRE 2002a). In subsequent development plans, such as the 2002–03 Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program and the 2005/06–2009/10 plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty, the potential involvement of the diaspora in accelerating development through the inflow of ideas, skills, investment capital, and remittances was further underscored (Chacko and Gebre 2017). The Ethiopian government revamped its diaspora engagement strategy following its 2010–15 Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) by lifting legal restrictions and further easing the diaspora's ability to engage in investment, trade, and volunteer activities (FDRE 2002b).

But the Ethiopian government has also had an uneasy relationship with NGOs. In 2009 it adopted the Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies, a comprehensive law that prevented any organization with significant external funding from engaging in a wide range of advocacy, peace-building, and human rights activities (Brechenmacher 2017). Along with the Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation in 2008 and the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Law, these laws restrict both the establishment and activities of NGOs, putting in place new mechanisms for monitoring these bodies (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2015) that make it difficult for foreign NGOs to operate with ease in Ethiopia.

Nonetheless, human development and poverty alleviation/eradication continue to be central to the official development strategies of the Ethiopian Government. The government's stated policies are focused on pro-poor programs and investments to accelerate poverty reduction, but also recognize the need for economic development and to create jobs as its demographic dividend comes of age (UNDP 2018). As part of the second phase of its Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II 2015–20), the Ethiopian government's stated aim is to continue to expand physical infrastructure, make the country a hub for manufacturing, and raise the rate of GDP growth to

11 percent per annum. Moreover, Ethiopia's goal is to reach lower-middle-income status by 2025 (FDRE 2016) and to follow the guidance of the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve this.

Simultaneously, the government has been wooing the diaspora as active participants in the country's development. Aware of the emerging economic power of the diaspora, the Ethiopian government has been actively engaged in mobilizing diaspora investment as well as philanthropy using policy and non-policy means. In 2018, it asked the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a UN agency, to formulate and conduct mapping exercises to assess the willingness and ability of the Ethiopian diaspora to contribute to the development of their homeland. Based on feedback from the Ethiopian diaspora residing in the Washington Metropolitan Area (home of the largest cluster of Ethiopians in the USA), the IOM found that the diaspora was interested in investing and contributing to development particularly in sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, general infrastructure, and business. However, the ability of the diaspora was somewhat hampered by the relatively low earnings of the group (IOM 2018).

At around the same time, the Ethiopian government undertook a voluntary review of the early performance trends of SDGs at the national level and published its findings in 2017. It decided to focus on six (1, 2, 3, 5, 9, and 14)¹ of the seventeen SDG goals but did not provide a rationale for the choice of these particular SDGs. The review found that the government was committed to integrating the SDGs into GTP II and in implementing pro-poor and pro-growth policies and plans within a decentralized administrative system to address the economic, social, and even political needs of its populace. Despite challenges faced due to drought, declining market prices of export commodities, and difficulties in mobilizing financial resources, the review stated that the country was on the path to achieving the SDGs (FDRE 2017). According to the review, among the factors that set Ethiopia on the path to fulfilling the SDGs were "expanded capabilities to mobilize and utilize the community for development" and "institutional and organizational arrangements for effective implementation of SDGs" (FDRE 2017, 41), in which the diaspora can clearly play a significant role.

The Ethiopian Diaspora Trust Fund (EDTF) was created in 2018 in response to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's call for the diaspora to donate a

1 **SDG 1:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere; **SDG 2:** End hunger, achieve food security, and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; **SDG 3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; **SDG 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; **SDG 9:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation; and **SDG 14:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

dollar a day to support development activities in Ethiopia. The fund focuses primarily on people-focused social and economic development projects prioritizing health, education, water, and the provision of sanitation facilities. By end of January 2020, the EDTF had raised close to \$6 million from 25,755 donors organized under 46 chapters covering 99 countries around the world (Ethiopia Development Trust Fund 2020).

The Ethiopian Diaspora in the United States: An Overview

Since the late 1970s, an estimated three million Ethiopians have left their country and settled in other parts of the world (IOM 2018). The first wave of Ethiopian outmigration that occurred in the aftermath of the bloody Marxist Revolution of 1974 was mainly to developed world countries in North America and Western Europe. The outflow continued and swelled during two decades of civil war (1974–91), with Ethiopians migrating to developed world countries as well as other countries in Africa and the Middle East (Getahun 2007). In the United States, key legislation such as the passing of the 1980 Refugee Act, the introduction of the Diversity Visa (also known as the Lottery Visa), and family reunification policies further assisted in facilitating immigration from Ethiopia (Chacko 2009; Getahun 2007). The number of Ethiopians immigrants admitted to the United States doubled from less than 4000 a year in the early 1990s to more than 7500 a year since the late 1990s (Gebre 2004). Ethiopians in the United States thus grew from a small base of 10,000 immigrants in 1980 to 312,444 in 2017. Today, the United States is home to the largest population of Ethiopians in the diaspora and comprises Ethiopia-born first-generation immigrants, who form the bulk (69%) of the ethnic group in the country, and their US-born children. The Ethiopian diaspora is spread across the United States, but the largest numbers of ethnic Ethiopians are found in California, Virginia, Maryland, Minnesota, and Texas (US Bureau of the Census 2017).

Starting in the late 1990s, Ethiopia became an important source country for US parents wishing to adopt children from overseas. Between 1999 and 2018, 15,807 children were adopted from Ethiopia to the United States, but the numbers fluctuated over the years. In 1999 the number of Ethiopian children adopted was 145, rising to a high of 2,511 adoptions in 2010, and falling to 177 adoptions in 2018 (US Department of State 2020). On January 11, 2018, the Ethiopian legislature banned intercountry adoption altogether (US Department of State 2018). But the thousands of Ethiopian children who came to the United States as adoptees may be considered a part of the Ethiopian diaspora even if their adoptive parents are not of Ethiopian ethnicity.

Ethiopian Diaspora Associations in the United States and Philanthropy

The Ethiopian diaspora, which first began leaving the home country in the 1970s, is now well entrenched in many receiving countries in the West. First-generation immigrants from Ethiopia who settled permanently in areas such as Europe, North America, and Australia gained citizenship in these countries, while their progeny who were born in the receiving country became a part of these nations through birth. Although distance and the expense of travel to Africa prohibited most Ethiopian immigrants from returning to the motherland on a regular basis, they visited when possible and maintained contact with their relatives and close friends in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian immigrants in the United States initially established community organizations to help maintain their traditions as well as assist the newly arrived to acclimate to American culture and society. Early religious and cultural organizations provided spiritual and social support and offered vital services to new immigrants by helping them develop English language competency, find jobs, and become familiar with American laws and civic responsibilities. The community also created self-help groups that aimed to build social, professional, and other networks to enhance their careers. Over time, Ethiopian organizations in the United States diversified their interests to include sports leagues, political advocacy groups, and professional associations for immigrants (Chacko 2009; Chacko and Gebre 2017). Although largely focused on the Ethiopian immigrant community's needs, individuals and associations also offered financial and material support to those in the homeland. In 2018, the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States transferred an estimated US\$ 131 million to Ethiopia, making it the largest source of remittances to the country (World Bank 2019a).

Based on this study, it is clear that with the exception of a handful of philanthropic organizations that came into being in the late 1990s, most of the diaspora's transnational philanthropic efforts are through organizations established after 2000. Over the years, these diaspora organizations have increasingly begun to play a role in helping in the development of people and places in Ethiopia. Philanthropy by the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States that is channeled through immigrant organizations, associations, and foundations today includes voluntary forms of private financial contributions, skills and knowledge transfer, and voluntary work and advocacy that are for public benefit. About 20 percent of the Ethiopian diaspora associations in our study were multisectoral in nature while the rest focus on one or two sectors, with the two most popular being health and education.

However, these organizations are diverse in their focus, ranging from the provision of athletic shoes to runners in Gondar by the Ethiopia Project,

founded in 2010, to those that are broad-based and focus on education, health care, and infrastructure development as well activities that span multiple sectors. Some of these associations work with individuals and small organizations in Ethiopia, while others collaborate with NGOs and regional governments as well as the Ethiopian Government to realize their goals. The vast majority (67%) of the organizations operated in regionally specific areas, with as many as 22 percent being located in Addis Ababa, and 21 percent in Oromia. The Amhara region (Gondar in particular) and Tigray also received significant levels of philanthropy from US diasporans.

While Ethiopian immigrants may have founded or co-founded charitable organizations in the United States, many of these organizations look beyond the ethnic Ethiopian population to raise funds, obtain materials, and mobilize expertise needed for their charitable ventures. For example, Village Health Partnership, an NGO founded by Ethiopian diasporans based in Denver, Colorado that operates in rural Ethiopia, obtained permission from the American Academy of Pediatrics to translate the “Helping Babies Breathe” curriculum into Amharic, so that it could be used in Ethiopia. The organization is also listed in GlobalGiving (a global crowdfunding platform for grassroots charitable projects) and raised nearly \$18,000 through this portal. Similarly, the Ethiopian American Foundation, based in Michigan, markets itself as “a medium through which contributions in ideas, time and resources from Ethiopians, Ethiopian Americans and American friends of Ethiopia can be channeled to help strengthen Ethiopia’s institutions of higher education and enable them to face up to the challenges of the twenty-first century” (EAF n.d.).

Motivations of Ethiopian Diaspora Organizations and their Founders

The glue that binds a diaspora is an emotional connection to a shared culture, identity, and homeland (Werbner 2002). Although separated from the country of origin by distance and time, diasporans who are aware of the challenges faced by compatriots feel compassion and are often keen to assist those in need (Brinkerhoff 2011; Gardner 2018). For some, enjoying a higher quality of life in the country of settlement may spur diasporans to engage in philanthropy out of a sense of moral obligation or duty (Brinkerhoff 2011).

In this study, identity as a diasporan belonging to a homeland framed philanthropy for founders and members of Ethiopian immigrant groups. Diasporan philanthropists had roots or felt connected to the homeland due to a variety of reasons. As Milton Fikre, a 1.5-generation founder of a charitable foundation for orphaned children with HIV-AIDS, notes: “no matter

how far removed we may be from Ethiopia, we are all Ethiopians! We have a congenital longing for our homeland” (2008). Some have established foundations and NGOs geared towards human development in Ethiopia, with assistance being directed to underprivileged persons belonging to the founders’ regions of origin or with whom they share ethnicity. A case in point is the Ethiopian American doctor from California who, after going on yearly medical missions to his native Oromia for over a decade, founded the organization Ethiopia Health Aid in 2007 to address chronic and easily preventable diseases and conditions that were causing high morbidity and mortality in the region.

Suffering and deprivation that have been witnessed personally by individual diasporans is frequently the catalyst for giving back in multiple ways, including in-kind donations, financial contributions, and investments of time and expertise. Messeret Ethiopia was founded in 1998 by seven Ethiopians living in New York City, who were moved by the plight of street children in Addis Ababa. Messeret Ethiopia has organized walkathons to raise funds to feed, clothe, and shelter street children and provide them with necessary medical care. The organization later began providing vocational training to poor children living with their families.

A desire to give back to the people of the homeland who had suffered was also the motivation of the founders of Youth Impact (Ethiopia) who returned to their native country after communism fell to start a ministry and provide a home for orphaned boys and girls. The founder of Ethiopia’s Tomorrow was raised in a Catholic orphanage in Dire Dawa before she moved to the United States in her late teens to study on a scholarship. A chance return to the orphanage, which was about to close due to financial problems, prompted her to form the NGO Ethiopia’s Tomorrow to raise funds for better housing and education for the orphanage’s forty-eight girls. She felt that the nuns in the orphanage had provided her with a foundation that helped her achieve academic success and a chance to live in the United States, and she wished to return in some measure the support she had received as a girl.

Although many of the charities were established by diasporans who are native Ethiopians, others were set up by children of first-generation immigrants who, while visiting the motherland, were motivated by the discrepancies between their privileged lives and the disadvantaged situation of many in Ethiopia, and sought to rectify this imbalance in some way. Friends and family may also establish charitable foundations to simultaneously honor a loved one and address pressing needs in Ethiopia. The Fregenet Foundation, with its focus on education, was established to honor the life of a young Ethiopian American woman who had been passionate about providing education to the children of Ethiopia but who died in a car accident.

Foundations have also been set up by non-ethnic Ethiopians who adopted Ethiopian infants. For example, the Lelt Foundation was established in 2011 by two white American women who met in Addis Ababa while adopting their respective daughters. The American co-founders witnessed extreme poverty in the Ethiopian capital. Feeling that they now had familial connections with Ethiopia, they set out to tackle some of the underlying causes of poverty by focusing on nutrition, education, and employment. Similarly, SmileEthiopia is a medical mission that was founded in 2008 by white American dentists who had adopted an Ethiopian infant. The NGO organizes yearly trips to Addis Ababa, during which teams of American dentists, supported by non-medical personnel, set up centers for tooth extraction and dental surgery. The team operates in Korah, an area in Addis Ababa that was a former leper colony and home to a hundred thousand impoverished people. Thus, while the motivations of founders for engaging in philanthropy are manifold, all of them stem from a connection to Ethiopia and a desire to assist in improving the lives of people in the country.

Ethiopian Diaspora Organizations and their Involvement in Development and Select SDGs

Fighting poverty has been an important theme for multilateral agencies, international organizations, and national governments in less developed parts of the world since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals listed the elimination of poverty by 2015 as its target, and the first of the Sustainable Development Goals strives to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere.” In its review, the government of Ethiopia notes that it appreciates the contributions the SDGs can make “to Ethiopia’s aspirations to eradicate poverty and bring about prosperity for its people” (FDRE 2017). All of the philanthropic diaspora organizations in this study wished to alleviate poverty in Ethiopia, but through different means. While poverty is a complex structural problem for which there is no quick fix, the organizations hoped to address some of the conditions that lead to poverty or keep people poor, such as ill health, the lack of proper nutrition, the lack of education or skills and the lack of a proper shelter. Therefore, closely related to SDG 1 are SDG 2 (to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture) and SDG 3 (to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages).

Half of the philanthropic diaspora organizations that we investigated were either focused entirely on education or believed that providing education was an important component of their services. These organizations largely focused on children and youth, supplying scholarships, materials (books,

desks, lockers, laptops), and services such as tutoring, preparation for college admissions, vocational training, and career development. Some were involved in building infrastructure for education such as schools and colleges as well as labs, computer and career centers, libraries, and bathrooms within educational institutions. However, a couple also addressed problems of adult illiteracy.

A second important focus was health, an emphasis for almost half of the organizations studied. Healthcare in Ethiopia is compromised by both availability and accessibility issues. The country suffers from a chronic shortage of trained medical personnel such as physicians and nurses, as well as limited health infrastructure and medical supplies. It has been noted that there are many more Ethiopian doctors in the diaspora than in the country (El-Khawas 2004). Among diaspora organizations that focused on health and health care were those that worked with children, youth, women, and the elderly. Several offered one or more hot meals each day or food for families. Children and youth in educational programs were usually provided access to medical check-ups and treatment.

Some diaspora organizations addressed health issues by providing access to clean potable water and sanitation facilities, which lowered the incidence of water-borne diseases, a significant cause of morbidity especially in rural areas. Still others focused on maternal and baby health, running rural health-care centers whose staff were able to identify pregnant women with complications so that these women could be transported to more sophisticated medical facilities for treatment in a timely manner.

Four of the thirty-six diaspora organizations included in this study were engaged in providing medical services and in the training of midwives, pharmacists, doctors, and other medical personnel. Ethiopian American healthcare professionals returned to Ethiopia on a regular basis on medical missions to provide free medical services to people in need of them. They donated their time, resources, and expertise and some participated in short-term missions lasting one to two weeks to deliver direct patient care. These visiting teams offered medical services that ranged from basic care to specialized services including surgery to populations that could not afford these interventions.

Organizations such as the Ethio-American Doctors Group (EADG), a consortium of more than 350 physicians and health professionals, has the goal of providing health services and facilitating the transfer of medical skills and experiences to the medical personnel in Ethiopia, while Ethiopian Pharmacists and Pharmaceutical Scientists in Diaspora (EPPAD) seeks to strengthen pharmaceutical education and systems in Ethiopia. People to People (P2P) is another philanthropic organization based in the United States that works towards improving health care and reducing the spread of diseases in Ethiopia and amongst Ethiopian diaspora communities globally.

The emphasis on education and health among philanthropic diaspora organizations mirrors the pattern of family foundations globally, with education being the top priority, constituting 29 percent of the average philanthropic portfolio, followed by health with 14 percent of giving portfolios (Botha 2020).

Sustainable Development Goal 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In its review of the progress Ethiopia had made towards achieving the SDGs, the Ethiopian government noted that it had faced several challenges in achieving this crucial goal. In this study, almost all the philanthropic diaspora organizations that had education as a focus explicitly mentioned girls as the target group or included girls in their portfolio. In rural areas, while addressing water and sanitation needs, some organizations like Stream of Hope noted that women and girls in particular were affected by water scarcity as they were traditionally responsible for water collection. Although not stated explicitly, the organization's website alludes to the negative effects on health and loss of the possibility of human capital formation caused by as little as spending time getting water for the household.

The final two Sustainable Development Goals that the Ethiopian government examined in its voluntary review were SDG 9 (to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation) and SDG 14 (to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development). The philanthropic ventures in this study are small to medium in size, with several being organized through networks of families and friends. Achieving SDG 9 requires large outlays of financial capital which are currently beyond the scope of the diaspora, while SDG 14 needs, in addition, the formulation and implementation of environmental policies to use water resources sustainably. It is therefore not surprising that none of the organizations in this study undertaken projects that address either of these goals. With the Ethiopian government's push for greater privatization, including the imminent privatization of key state-owned sectors such as telecom, aviation, energy, and logistics (Kimani 2019), there might be more private investment from abroad, but this is unlikely to come from the diaspora.

Conclusion

There has been a rise in the number of Ethiopian diaspora organizations since the beginning of the new millennium and several of these are involved in philanthropic activities that are aimed at development in Ethiopia. Ethiopians in the diaspora who engage in philanthropy in their ancestral

homeland are driven by strong cultural connections to Ethiopia, feelings of belonging, and a desire to help improve the lives of people living there. The focus of the philanthropic work of Ethiopian diaspora organizations in this study aligns quite well with the priorities of the EDTF but are not as clearly associated with the first six SDGs that the Ethiopian government reviewed in 2017. Although most of the organizations included in this study were not directly involved in economic development, several focused on the development of human resources and therefore contribute in numerous small ways to creating conditions necessary for economic growth, such as a healthy and educated workforce.

Realizing that diaspora associations cannot increase the scope of their projects without outside assistance, many have formed coalitions with other organizations such as NGOs in both the country of origin and settlement to help facilitate their work in Ethiopia. The limited ability of the diaspora to fund large philanthropic projects has led to many reaching beyond their compatriots as sources of funds and materials, drawing in non-Ethiopians living in their state or town or further afield. They have been aided by communications technologies that have revolutionized the way people organize and interact, facilitating philanthropic donations across borders. All the websites of the organizations that we studied had a button or a link reading “Donate” or “Support us.” This, as well as links on some of their sites to crowdfunding platforms, allowed these organizations to widen their donor base beyond the community of Ethiopians in the diaspora. It is important that these organizations can be vetted by outside agencies such as Charity Navigator, which provide unbiased reports on the financial health, accountability, and transparency of non-profit charities as well as their commitment to good governance and best practices. Those that are rated highly are likely to inspire trust and, therefore, giving from the populace.

The services and programs that diaspora associations in this study sought to deliver in Ethiopia were largely complementary to the government strategies, providing additional channels for implementation as well as expanding the geographical distribution of these programs in some cases. While many of the diasporan associations may be solely or primarily interested in philanthropic efforts that benefit their own group or region, they would be better able to ease socioeconomic inequalities and address issues related to poverty if they were to partner with larger agencies or even regional and federal governments. But scaling up projects to reach larger populations requires significant funding and commitment from the highest levels of government as well as a desire and trust on the part of the diaspora organizations to collaborate with regional or federal governments. Legislation by the Ethiopian government restricting the scope of work that foreign-funded NGOs can perform on politically sensitive issues can severely compromise the possibility of such collaborations.

Political and economic stability are critical factors for attracting the diaspora's contributions to development. The diaspora was initially willing to raise funds for Ethiopia's development through the EDTF and the Ethiopian government appeared ready and able to steer diasporan philanthropy through this unit. Diasporan philanthropy is not simply a charitable venture but can be a geopolitical issue especially if there is an overtly positive or negative relationship between the state and groups comprising various philanthropic diaspora organizations. The Ethiopian diaspora is a politically active one and therefore critical for increase in philanthropic flows and truly effective and wider partnerships is trust in the government. While money raised via the EDTF could indicate the willingness of the diaspora to contribute funds to government-driven social and economic development projects, the EDTF is beginning to resemble a parastatal NGO created by EPRDF parties. Diaspora groups with large numbers of members affiliated with opposition parties would therefore more likely prefer to be involved in regional than national development projects.

Ethiopia has been experiencing ongoing political conflict and a civil war (from 2020–2022). Several of the diaspora organizations that we examined for this study were formed around shared ethnicity. While it is beyond the scope of this study, we recognize that an important issue in understanding the effectiveness and reach of diasporic philanthropy is to comprehend how such organizations operate in times of crisis—did their work exacerbate sectarian hostilities or were they able to reach across ethnic boundaries and assist without regard to ethnic and tribal affiliations?

Philanthropic diaspora groups working in regions and areas that are not the focus of the federal government's development efforts may be more effective in addressing issues such as gender inequalities that are likely to be influenced by cultural factors or local contexts. However, despite an uptick in philanthropic work in various development sectors by diaspora groups, these forms of philanthropy, while important, are insufficient for Ethiopia's daunting development challenges, a problem compounded recently by reductions in diaspora income and savings as well as the ability to travel back to Ethiopia due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Chapter II

Interrogating Ethiopia

Diaspora, Social Media, and Partisan Discourses

Shimelis Bonsa Gulema

Media enable a (re)imagining of new political subjectivities at a time when old conceptions of belonging and citizenship are constantly being contested. While allowing for greater democratization of the public sphere in which individuals can now express opinions and engage in conversations, the lack or difficulty of regulation is causing the rise or reification of political communities based on narrow and exclusivist understandings of identity. People are empowered and regaining a voice but are at the same time divided, through misleading information, indoctrination, as well as narrow and constraining debates. In Ethiopia, as elsewhere, digital media more than others offer the lens through which to interrogate local and diasporic narratives about history, memory, historiography, nation-building, and national identity. Debates over such issues as ownership and belonging (native versus immigrant) are part of a broader—at times raging—conversation about being, becoming, and belonging in a nation that is changing in ways that are simultaneously liberating and disempowering. This chapter uses social media discussions, from home and in the diaspora, on Ethiopia to explore questions of history, politics, and belonging in the age of intolerant nativism and contested globalization.

A Brief Note on Methodology

A study of an intensely polarized media environment, social media in particular pose their own challenges. This, to some extent, has to do with how one chooses which issues, narratives, social media sites, and personalities

to explore, as well as and why these choices have been made. Any attempt to produce knowledge on such a complicated and constantly evolving subject requires methodological rigor in the collection and analysis of data. The research for this chapter begins with the following hypotheses: that Ethiopia's social media sphere (that is, social media discussions on Ethiopia from within and without) is considerably diverse; that it is constantly evolving; and that it is increasingly polarized. These evolving features of the social media landscape are reflective in many ways of a similar development within other domains of the Ethiopian media sphere.

My sampling strategy was developed accordingly to show the complexity and dynamism of Ethiopian, specifically diaspora-based, social media on the one hand and its growing polarization on the other. I used Facebook as the principal social media platform where the vast majority of online conversations on Ethiopia occur. I also engaged Twitter, which is another, albeit less common, platform for Ethiopian online conversations. In addition, I included a few posts on TikTok, which has become a favorite venue for posting short videos. What I did on the three platforms was to map a select number of Facebook (116), Twitter (23), and TikTok (12) pages that have reasonable numbers of followers, likes, and comments, where conversations occur in Amharic but also English, and which raise and engage in topical issues on Ethiopia. I selected topics, predominantly political, that have attracted cross-group discussions/postings and those that elicited partisan commentaries/conversations.

Introduction

In May 1991, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) led a successful insurgency that toppled the government led by Colonel Mengistu Haile-Maryam. This change of regime would soon be attended by a significant restructuring of the Ethiopian state, especially following the adoption of a deeply controversial constitution in 1995.¹ What the document enshrined was a radical political arrangement which "federalized" the country into a number of ethno-linguistic regional states, currently numbering twelve, following the break up of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State into four new regions (Sidama, South Ethiopia, South West Ethiopia, and Central Ethiopia). This new political dispensation in which federalism became ethnicized was both liberating

1 Eyder Peralta, "Can a Unified Ethiopia Exist Under the Country's Current Constitution?" NPR, December 13, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/13/787952319/can-a-unified-ethiopia-exist-under-the-countrys-current-constitution>.

and empowering but also forbidding and disenfranchising. The deep roots of such a transformational yet profoundly contentious experiment is to be found in the developments of Ethiopia's *long* nineteenth century—the intensely problematic making of modern Ethiopia, its marginal incorporation into the global capitalist economy, and its ambivalent encounter with capitalist modernity.

The short genealogy of this political change, however, begins in earnest in the 1960s when young progressive Ethiopians, who included literary figures and left-leaning intellectuals, called for a fundamental reorganization of the Ethiopian state to address structural inequities, though it was narrowly defined along class and ethnic lines. The Ethiopian Student Movement laid the intellectual and cultural foundation for the revolutionary changes Ethiopia has experienced since the early 1970s.² In 1974, a revolution ended Ethiopia's ancient monarchy and destroyed its ideological and material foundations. A socialist regime—the Derg—that emerged in the process reorganized the state while seeking to address what was deemed “class and national oppression.” This involved redistribution of the means of production, especially rural land, to farmers and allowing a limited expression of cultural rights.³

However transformative many of the measures of Ethiopia's first post-imperial regime (1974–91) were, they were far from fulfilling demands for greater cultural and political autonomy, respect for basic civil and political rights or resolving the quest for economic development. The conditions were thus set for a second radical experiment that came with the rise of a new government in 1991, the EPRDF.⁴ The 1995 Constitution and the adoption of ethnic federalism could be said to have introduced arguably the most revolutionary reordering of Ethiopia's political landscape. This new constitutional arrangement created ethno-regional states and granted them the right to self-determination up to and including secession (Article 39), a uniquely Ethiopian experiment—when we discount Stalin's failed attempts to do something similar in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s.

Nevertheless, the remaking of Ethiopia as a multiethnic federal state is intensely, at times violently, contested. The critique of the inventionist experiment is partly rooted in the partisanship in the making of the constitution itself, the definition of ethnicity and its elevation as the dominant political framework, the conception of federalism, the relationship between federal and regional governments, the status of minorities (including minoritized communities) and majorities (and majoritized minorities), the administration

2 Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Ethiopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, c. 1960–1974* (New York: James Currey, 2014).

3 Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975).

4 Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe, *Laying the Past to Rest: The EPRDF and the Challenges of Ethiopian State-Building* (London: Hurst, 2020).

of multiethnic areas, and urban centers in particular. These and other thorny issues are subjected to deeply politicized and often hyper-polarized debates inside the country and among the global Ethiopian diaspora, using various media platforms that increasingly include social media. At the heart of their interrogation is Ethiopia's cultural and political identity—what Ethiopia is and what it wants to be as a nation and a state. The past has become a key site of contestation and is constantly and often selectively recalled to in/dis-inform the discussions, which are largely about the present and the future.

The Media as a New Platform of Expression

Ethiopia has a long tradition of intellectual discussions on sacred and secular topics. Theological examinations in particular had a cherished history in the country although they were at times entangled with or even became a cause for some of the religious and political violence in the country. Presses of a religious nature emerged first in 1863 at Massawa, modern Eritrea, and continued in subsequent decades, all led or owned by foreign missionaries.⁵

However, material discussions about government, economy, politics, and society were a characteristic of the early twentieth century which also coincided with the rise of the first generation of Ethiopia's modern intelligentsia.⁶ At the time, such newspapers as *A'emero*⁷ and, more importantly, *Berhanena Selam*⁸ became essential venues for the exchange of ideas about history, progress, unity, government, modernization, and foreign relations. Given that these discussions were reformist in nature and were not calling for any radical changes in politics or government, they were tolerated, if not always endorsed, by leaders of the country, principally Ras Teferi Mekonnen, the future Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–74).

In the 1950s and after, legal and institutional avenues of public discourse expanded,⁹ and the depth and demands of the discussions increasingly

5 Richard Pankhurst, "The Foundation of Education, Printing, Newspapers, Book Production, Libraries, and Literacy in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia Observer* 6, no. 3 (1962): 248; Berhanu M. Deneke, "The Development of Magazine Publishing: The Case of Ethiopia" (M.A. thesis, Cardiff University, 1991), 52–54.

6 Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: James Currey; Athens: Ohio University Press; Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002).

7 *A'emero* (Intelligence) was Ethiopia's first newspaper that emerged around 1901, during the reign of Emperor Menelik (1889–1913).

8 *Berhanena Selam* (Light and Peace) was founded in 1925 under the leadership of Ras Teferi Mekonen. It lasted until 1936.

9 A series of new decrees and constitutional provisions recognized freedom of expression and allowed the creation of private media. These were the decrees

changed. There were now more penetrating analyses of the Ethiopian condition and a growing call for a sweeping change in the political and economic order in the country. However, these critical interrogations did not mean that there was media freedom or freedom of expression in the country. Censorship pervaded the media landscape and there were many instances of government interfering in the work of the media, including those that were privately owned. Total government control of the media and flow of information, however, had to await the arrival of the military government. This was despite constitutional provisions for freedom of expression.¹⁰ One major exception, though, came in the early years of the new regime when there were intensely free, albeit polarized, debates in both private and government media on issues of national significance, such as democracy, the form of government, and economic policy. These debates were, however, short lived.¹¹

EPRDF represented a major departure when it comes to opening up the political space and guaranteeing freedom of expression, at least at the beginning. The government ratified the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (217 A/111), especially Article 19, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." In 1992, it promulgated the Freedom of the Press Act (Press Law 34/1992) and by 1997 there were 287 independently owned newspapers and magazines, the highest number ever in Ethiopia.¹² The result was an upsurge of opinions and commentaries, some deeply critical and mostly polarized. As I have written elsewhere,¹³ the media in Ethiopia, the private press in particular, "began life not as an instrument of government but as a rebel," reporting on topics of great national concern and absorbing interest to the public. While the key story of the Ethiopian media was one of valor and sacrifice in the defense and, to a large extent, in the fostering of the democratization process, one

of 1942 and 1944, the Revised Constitution of 1955 (Article 41), and the Penal Code of 1957.

- 10 Proclamation No. 26/1967 (Ethiopian Calendar) was passed to achieve that objective; the 1987 Constitution made a provision for freedom of expression (Chapter 7, Articles 47, 49) but it did not lead to the rise of an independent private media in the country. See Tedbabe Tilahun, "Be Etiyopya ye Gil Press Edgetina Chigroch" (B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1990 EC), 20–21; Wuletaw Baye, "Ye Press Netsanet be Ethiopia" (B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1990 EC), 36.
- 11 John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (London: Red Sea Press, 1978), 96.
- 12 Tilahun, "Be Etiyopya ye Gil Press Edgetina Chigroch," 32.
- 13 Shimelis Bonsa [Gulema], *Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia: 1991–1999* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2000), 68.

cannot be oblivious of its other, equally important features: libelous, highly sensational, outspokenly partisan, deeply intolerant, and intensely political and politicized. Increasingly, the boundary between objective news reporting and analysis on the one hand and news-making on the other became blurred.¹⁴ In a fundamental way, the partisanship of the media and the public sphere at large is a reflection of a long tradition of political intolerance that pervaded modern Ethiopia's tortuous politics.¹⁵

The arrival of social media in the late 1990s proved a tremendous boost to civic engagement in everyday politics. At the same time, social media have shown their enormous disruptive capacity that could threaten public safety but also shake the very foundations of democracy and a democratic society. Social media's function as a double-edged sword is particularly intense in deeply polarized societies. No case better exemplifies this than the state of politics and discourse in contemporary Ethiopia and the global Ethiopian diaspora as they are played out online on social media.

Social Media and the “Democratization” of Free Speech

Social media has recently become one of the most popular and widely used tools of mass communication in the world. The massive expansion of social media technologies and platforms has considerably enlarged the opportunities for public participation as both content consumers and generators of information.¹⁶ It has also increased the global reach and influence of corporations that own such social media platforms as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube.

There are many instances in which social media platforms have served as a force for good. By expanding the flow of information, enhancing awareness, deepening civil activism, and facilitating networking and organizing, social media contributed to social and political changes in several parts of the world, including the Philippines where text messaging helped the downfall of a corrupt president.¹⁷ The Internet, mobile phones, and social media like Facebook

14 Ethiopia—Transition to Democracy, *Proceedings of a Workshop* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1991), 132–34.

15 Messay Kebede, *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960–1974* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008).

16 H. Maisam, “Latest Social Media Stats for 2019,” accessed March 1, 2021, <https://socialmedianewstime.com/2018/01/22/latest-social-media-stats-for-2019/>; T. Keith, “The History of Social Media: Social Networking Revolution,” accessed March 1, 2021, <https://historycooperative.org/the-history-of-social-media/>.

17 Raul Pertieria, *The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines* (Seoul: fes-media Asia, 2012).

and Twitter played important, if not decisive roles during the Arab Spring (2011 onwards).¹⁸ In the US, social media platforms were some of the tools used to assist in networking, organizing, and mobilizing during the Occupy (Wall Street) Movement in 2011 and in several others that came after.¹⁹

The roles and influence of social media and the corporations that control the platforms are, however, more complicated than is often presented. During the Arab Spring, for instance, social media was just one among many channels used to enhance social and political networking and spread information outside of the region rather than inside it, “acting like a megaphone more than a rallying cry.”²⁰ Some even argue that seeing the Arab Spring as a “Facebook revolution” is little more than a social media myth that needs to be busted.²¹ Although Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Microsoft became useful tools for many activists during the uprising, they were never a determining factor in the revolution. These social media platforms may in fact have ended up limiting or inhibiting political activism.²² For others, there is no correlation between social media use and popular unrest.²³

On the contrary, however, the last several years have shown how social media platforms could become a threat to democracy and societal peace and stability. Big Tech corporations’ flawed business models and lack of regulation over content moderation have opened up a Pandora’s box of lack of transparency and accountability, disinformation, hate speech, incitement of

- 18 Merlyna Lim, “Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011,” *Journal of Communications* 62, no. 2 (2012): 231–48; Jeffrey Ghannam, *Digital Media in the Arab World One Year After the Revolution* (Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance, the National Endowment for Democracy, 2012).
- 19 Kevin M. DeLuca, Sean Lawson, and Ye Sun, “Occupy Wall Street on the Public Screens of Social Media: The Many Framings of the Birth of a Protest Movement,” *Communication, Culture Critique* 5, no. 4 (2012): 483–509.
- 20 Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, et al., “Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict After the Arab Spring,” *Peaceworks*: United States Institute for Peace, July 10, 2012, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/07/blogs-and-bullets-ii-new-media-and-conflict-after-arab-spring>.
- 21 Haythem Guesmi, “The Social Media Myth about the Arab Spring,” *AlJazeera* Online, January 27, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/27/the-social-media-myth-about-the-arab-spring>.
- 22 William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York, “Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements,” *Journal of Communication* vol 6, no. 2 (2012): 315–29.
- 23 Chonghyun Christie Byun and Ethan J. Hollander, “Explaining the Intensity of the Arab Spring,” *DOMES: Digest of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 26–46.

violence, harassment, censorship, spamming, manipulations, and troll operations. Take, for example, user-generated online content. This can be seen as a case of democratization of alternative information flow and therefore a challenge to mainstream news media outlets; at the same time, however, it raises fundamental questions about the credibility of such information and the difficulty of verifying it depending on where it comes from, to whom it is attributed, and the objectives underlying its dissemination.

Powerful forces have weaponized social media to criminalize dissent and Big Tech have failed to challenge that or, in many cases, have enabled it by collaborating with repressive governments. Making a profit seems to trump the defense of dissent, privacy, free speech, and democracy. The cost of such inaction could be fatal and there is no better evidence of that than the deadly riot on Capitol Hill in Washington on January 6, 2021.²⁴ The world is, however, filled with numerous examples of profit-driven Big Tech capitalism and the unregulated excesses of social media enabling the spread of extremist ideologies, the tribalization of political discourse, the incitement of violence, and the persecution of tens of thousands of people in many parts of the world.

Is Ethiopia different? Not so much. Social media in Ethiopia,²⁵ as elsewhere, have contributed to expanding and democratizing, if not deepening, the public sphere. People who have access to information and communication technologies (internet, mobile phones, computers) now have the ability to express and disseminate their opinion on a variety of issues on a number of social media platforms. One of the benefits of the “democratization” of expression is the plurality of opinions, thus subverting the tyranny of hegemonic narratives. The challenge, however, is that extreme forms of this multiplicity of opinions and narratives include the mainstreaming of fringe languages, ideas, and groups, not to mention the spread of unverified or even manufactured information.

Although the democratization of freedom of expression counters the forces of homogeneity and hegemony, it does not necessarily entail a full-scale enlargement and deepening of the public sphere or public participation. Digital democracy exists in parallel with a digital divide in which the vast majority of Ethiopia’s—and the world’s—population is excluded from

24 Sophie Bushwick, “What the Capitol Riot Data Download Shows about Social Media Vulnerabilities,” *Scientific American*, January 27, 2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-the-capitol-riot-data-download-shows-about-social-media-vulnerabilities/>.

25 Abreham Getachew and Tibebe Beshah, “The Role of Social Media in Citizen’s Political Participation,” in *ICT Unbounded, Social Impact of Bright ICT Adoption*, ed. Yogesh Dwivedi, Emmanuel Ayaburi, Richard Boateng, and John Effa (Cham: Springer, 2019), 487–96.

everyday democracy. A January 2020 figure clearly confirms the comparatively low, albeit steadily growing share of mobile connections as well as Internet and social media users by population size, which is numbered at 116,969,912, making Ethiopia Africa's second most populous country.²⁶ Accordingly, Ethiopia was home to 46.75 million mobile connections (accounting for 41 percent of the population), 21.14 million internet users (19 percent of the population); 6,137,000 Facebook accounts, 686,200 Messenger users, 538,400 LinkedIn accounts, and 290,000 Instagram accounts.²⁷

However, access is just one indicator of the state of free speech and social media engagement in the country. Another is the nature, frequency, and depth of free speech, online free speech in particular. The 2016 *Mechachal* study shows how online debates about a number of issues, events, and personalities have been deeply polarized or polarizing.²⁸ These include the 2015 national election and Berhanu Nega's arrival in Eritrea in 2015 to start an armed resistance against the Ethiopian government.²⁹

Over the years, social media discussions on Ethiopia have changed qualitatively and assumed different features. Apart from a significant growth in online political participation, which was enabled by new technologies partly through their provision of tools to evade or limit government censorship and intimidation, the content of political participation has expanded to include new issues and new communities of online commentators. An important development in this regard is the rise of identity politics as a key organizer of intellectual and political discourse, both offline and online, inside and outside of the country. This follows the adoption of the 1995 constitution and the restructuring of the Ethiopian state in which ethnicity and ethnic membership have become the privileged avenue to politics. The new political order is attended by the rise of ethno-political activists who now use social media platforms to make political commentaries, raise awareness on the condition of their respective communities, and promote political goals, often couched in the name of their "nationally defined people," that is, their ethnic group.

The arrival of issues and groups that hitherto were on the margin of Ethiopia's mainstream politics could be said to have contributed to the

26 Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/ethiopia-population/>.

27 DATAREPORTAL, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ethiopia>.

28 Igino Gagliardone, et al., *Mechachal: Online Debates and Elections in Ethiopia; From Hate Speech to Engagement in Social Media* (Oxford: The Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy, University of Oxford, 2016).

29 Gagliardone et al., *Mechachal* 45–46, 75–95.

expansion of the political and discursive space and enrichment of the market of ideas. One is impressed by the considerable variety and richness of issues and groups that populate social media, enhance free speech, and deepen discourses within and across groups. The role of online active young, tech-savvy people is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, the *Mechachal* study notes that Ethiopia's youth were very engaged in online platforms and, unlike older people, were more inclined to take up "less contentious issues" and embrace "more universalistic forms of politics." An interesting fact in this case is that most social media posts, at least until 2016, were made by people based in Ethiopia, some 42 percent, compared to those from outside of the country, making up 22 percent.

At the same time, however, the online social media sphere is so unregulated that it facilitates the transmission of information that is inaccurate or manufactured, speech that is hateful or even dangerous, and debates that are deeply polarizing. Social media are like a double-edged sword that empowers and liberates but also disables and subverts. Polarized and binary thinking deeply permeates Ethiopian online media postings and debates and opportunities or spaces for conversations across groups are, worryingly, decreasing. Over the last few years, especially since the start of the Oromo Uprising in 2014, there is a clear trend of a new realignment of political forces, hardening of political positions, and compartmentalization of online groupings. Key occurrences have unleashed a chain of events in the process deepening the divisions and divisiveness of Ethiopian politics. These include the killing of Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020,³⁰ the subsequent imprisonment of prominent Oromo leaders, notably Jawar Mohammed, in June 2020,³¹ the disastrous civil war in the Tigray region (2020–22), and the recent burst of violence in Amhara (2023–).

It is important to mention in this connection that Ethiopian online debates did (and do) not occur in a political void and without risk for those involved. Increasingly, governments are making use of social media technologies and platforms to compose and impose their own, invariably authoritarian, visions of society and political and economic order. Such active use of social media has given them considerable powers of re/framing issues and shaping online debates while posing a serious threat to free speech, privacy,

30 Merga Yonas Bula, "Ethiopia: The Killing of Hachalu Hundessa Cuts Deep," *Deutsche Welle*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-the-killing-of-hachalu-hundessa-cuts-deep/a-54024538>.

31 Bekele Atoma, "Jawar Mohammed: The Ethiopian Media Mogul Taking on Abiy Ahmed," *BBC News*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53306091>; Abiy Ahmed, "Ethiopia Files Terror Charges Against Jawar Mohammad, Others," *Al Jazeera*, September 19, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/19/ethiopia-files-terror-charges-against-jawar-mohammed-others>.

and democracy. In Ethiopia, EPRDF and its security establishment, notably the Information Network Security Agency (INSA),³² have been known for deploying their massive resources including Facebook armies and online trolls to disinform, subvert, manipulate, intimidate, and harass.

Diaspora, Social Media, and the Rise of a Partisan Digital Public Sphere

The Ethiopian diaspora is now a global phenomenon, consisting arguably of more than three million Ethiopians and persons of Ethiopian origin dispersed over different regions of the world. More than a million of them are found in the Middle East, over six hundred thousand in Africa, over five hundred thousand in North America, and the rest in Europe, Australia, and Asia.³³ The Ethiopian diaspora is a product of a long series of forced, voluntary and semi-voluntary transnational migrations since the mid-twentieth century, especially since the late 1970s. If the political persecutions of the 1970s ushered in the first wave of Ethiopian international migration, deepening economic suffering and the quest for better opportunities could be said to have caused the second exodus in the 1980s, a trend which has continued to the present.³⁴ The geographic distribution of the Ethiopian diaspora has also expanded over the years, especially since 2000. With an estimated population of 305,800, Ethiopians in the US now constitute the second largest African immigrant group after Nigerians.³⁵ They also boast

32 <https://www.insa.gov.et/web/en>; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "Proclamation No. 808/2013: Information Network Security Agency Reestablishment Proclamation," *Negarit Gazette* 20, no. 6 (2014).

33 *Ethiopian Herald*, March 2017 quoted in IOM Development Fund, *Mapping of Ethiopian Diasporas Residing in the United States of America* (Addis Ababa: IOM, 2018), 2.

34 Solomon Addis Getahun, *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900–2000* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2006). Terence Lyons and H. G. Beyene have identified four phases of Ethiopian influx to the US: before 1974 (mainly for educational reasons); 1974–82 (political persecution); 1982–91 (family reunification); and since 1991 (because of ethnic violence and political repression). See Terence Lyons, "Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia," *Analysis: Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 4 (2007): 529–49; H. G. Beyene, "Are African Diasporas Development Partners, Peace-Makers or Spoilers? The Case of Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria," *Diaspora Studies* 8, no. 2 (2015): 145–61.

35 IOM Development Fund, "Mapping of Ethiopian Diasporas." See also Migration Policy Institute, "The Ethiopian Diaspora in the United States: July

a significant presence in other African countries (South Africa, Uganda, Sudan, Kenya), Europe (Britain, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden), Canada, Australia, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf (Kuwait, UAE, Qatar).³⁶

The migratory and diasporic experience of “global Ethiopians” has evolved over the years assuming considerably different features in the process. Increasingly, the Ethiopian diaspora has built considerable financial and political capital which it is investing back into its homeland. The remittance sent by Ethiopian diasporans, which amounted to over US\$ 4 billion by 2016,³⁷ not to mention their many investments in the country, and their growing political influence—which is evident in their transnational, even global, political organizing and social media activism—demonstrate that the diaspora is a force to be reckoned with. Two other crucial trends are worth mentioning here. One has to do with the gender dimension of the migration process, in which women have emerged as a significant block of the global Ethiopian diasporic experience.³⁸ Their overwhelming representation in migration across the Red Sea in particular is worthy of note, but so too is their presence, albeit less impactful, in the Ethiopian social media sphere, sharing their specific experiences and views on Ethiopia and visions for its future.

The other case is the growing cultural and ethnic heterogenization of Ethiopian transnational migration and diaspora. There are now more migrants and refugees coming from areas and communities that were only marginally represented in the migration process and the making of the global Ethiopian diaspora. Many of them were born and grew up in the last thirty years, under the firm and brutal grip of the EPRDF. This is a government that has opened up the political space and granted ethnic groups the right to self-rule, including going as far as the right to secession. But its politics of ethnic federalism have also deepened social division and the polarization of Ethiopian politics. Ethiopia’s contemporary immigrants/diasporans have gone through this experience, enjoying the fruits of the new political

2014,” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), accessed March 6, 2021. https://wamu.org/sites/wamu.org/files/file_attach/rad-ethiopia.pdf.

36 Gagliardone et al., *Mechachal*, 28–29.

37 IOM Development Fund, “Mapping of Ethiopian Diasporas,” 7–8.

38 The link between the demographics of migratory flows and the nature of online conversations is a subject that needs more study. Mention should be made, however, of the dominance of young and male commentators (reflecting their overwhelming presence in the migration flows); one big difference is the comparatively higher participation of women from the Gulf countries, where female migrants outnumber male.

dispensation, but have also borne the brunt of its excesses. All this informs their online activism and shapes their political organizing. The growing prominence of online debates and postings driven by ethnicity or identity-based politics is a logical outcome of political developments back in Ethiopia since the early 1990s.

Discussions of Ethiopia and Ethiopian affairs by early members, or at least precursors, of the “Ethiopian diaspora” go back to the early twentieth century. Young intellectuals, like Mikael Tesema,³⁹ living overseas, mainly in Europe and the US, used to send a series of articles on society, government, and political economy to *Berhanena Selam*, the weekly newspaper. Almost all members of this first generation of Ethiopian intellectuals who were based in the West, and a few in the East, and exposed to its education and culture did return and join public service. However, their stay in the West, albeit short in most cases, and the transformative experience in the process gave them a unique, albeit Western-informed, outlook as reflected in their writings. Interestingly, they also developed some of the features of a diaspora, without however having experienced any permanent displacement: a voyage with a possibility of never arriving and returning; a negotiation of being here and there; and a navigation of multiple belongings. One could argue that an Ethiopian diaspora was forming but remained unformulated and although these Ethiopians did not constitute a scattering, they fashioned the nucleus of what would eventually become the global Ethiopian diaspora.

Successive generations of young Ethiopians, at least until the late 1960s, continued the tradition of going overseas, while maintaining deep ties to the homeland. These ties include writing commentaries and reflections on Ethiopia and contributing to its defense, development, and global integration, with many emigrants eventually returning. Some, like Dr. Melaku Beyan,⁴⁰ sought to navigate the worlds of the homeland and hostland, which in Melaku’s case involved affirming the black experience in the US and calling for racial solidarity between his country and that of his African American wife, Mrs. Dorothy.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, there emerged a shift within the overseas Ethiopian community with regard to their diagnosis of the Ethiopian situation and their prescriptions, which were avowedly radical, a departure from the reformist focuses of their predecessors. They formed diaspora student associations like the Ethiopian Student Union in North America (ESUNA) and Ethiopian Students Union in Europe and engaged in ideologically rich, albeit intense, debates, which were published and disseminated. When the revolution broke out in 1974, many decided to return to join it, and many

39 Bahru, *Pioneers*, 85–86.

40 Bahru, *Pioneers*, 206–7.

were consumed by it. But a new tradition was created, which was arguably rooted in the very nature of their radical politics. It was an ideologically driven politics of intolerance that allowed no room for compromise or negotiation. The end result was the fratricide and sororicide of the 1970s, when tens of thousands of Ethiopians were killed by fellow Ethiopians. This political inheritance has survived years of repression under the Derg's authoritarian regime and could be said to have returned with vengeance following and as a consequence of the intensely partisan ethnic politics of the EPRDF. Online debates on Ethiopia since the 1990s demonstrate the resurgence of polarized politics and the corrosive powers of polarization.

Diaspora-based and -led online discussions on Ethiopia began in earnest in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the establishment of popular websites such as *Ethiopian Review*, *Nazreth.com*, *Cyber Ethiopia*, *Ethiomedias*, and *Quatero*. More and increasingly diverse websites emerged in the ensuing years, including those run by a new cadre of online journalists, consisting mainly of victims of EPRDF's media and political repression.⁴¹ They worked with and at times against the veterans, professionals, and intellectuals who had escaped the Derg's persecution and were now active as shapers of the discourse on the first generation of diaspora websites. Notwithstanding the largely adversarial tone of much of the online discussions at the time, these websites produced some of the most critical and intellectually solid commentaries on Ethiopian affairs.

As argued elsewhere, the Ethiopian diaspora's cyber discourse, like discussions back home, was never uniform and instead represented multiple strands of opinions, which in turn is a reflection of the heterogeneous nature of the diaspora and its political opinions. Demographic factors (age, gender, level of education, ethnicity, religion, region) are important, as are experiences as a migrant or as belonging to a diaspora. One can argue, therefore, that online debates on Ethiopia are far from being compartmentalized conversations within, and between, separate and self-contained online communities. Indeed, there are several enclosed online groups and many self-contained discussions but the idea of seeing them, and online conversations in general, as little more than echo chambers is misleading. What is never monolithic in this case is not just the Ethiopian diaspora and the diaspora's online presence, but also the many groups and group social media platforms

41 A wave of journalists were forced into exile because of the EPRDF's crack-down on the private media, especially in the late 1990s. Elias Wondimu, who now runs the respected Tsehai Publishing house, was one of them. Discussion with Elias, Los Angeles, May 2019.

that constitute it. The pluralism found within platforms and groups is just as dynamic as the pluralism found between platforms and groups.⁴²

It therefore seems possible to argue that it is the language that analysts use to describe the process and not the process itself that is more essentialist and homogenizing. The analytical homogenization of a widely diverse and constantly evolving online public sphere has created the perception that the Ethiopia diaspora (and its internal diasporas) are monolithic, and its politics is essentially antagonistic to the government. The reality is rather that the diaspora and its online presence contains increasing internal differentiation or is even fragmented into a collection of platforms for multiple interest groups.

There still appears, however, to be a trend towards a consolidation of a process in which the online sphere coalesces around certain social and political formations while allowing room for debates across groups and platforms. A number of factors are involved in fragmenting the online community but also forcing it to coalesce around a few powerful and rival ideological and political positions. Ideology and politics are crucial factors but they themselves are informed by such categories as class, ethnicity, gender, and religion. Key moments in the recent past have shown that the online and offline debates inside and outside of the country are about confronting modern Ethiopia's fundamental question: what Ethiopia is and what it wants to be.

In this light, we might argue that the battle over the past is more about the present and the future and that the debate over national history is not so much about whether it exists or not but about whether it is truly national and can be nationalized or not. In the absence of a national effort to write a national and nationalizable national history or to produce a political framework to manage the pluralism of Ethiopia, the polarized debate over the past, present, and future will intensify both offline and online. Seen through

42 Several Facebook pages of prominent online personalities have been examined including those of Jawar Mohamed, Tamagn Bekele, Zemedkun Bekele, Seyoum Teshome, Miky Amhara, Daniel Berhane, and Alula Solomon. The conventional distinction between pan-Ethiopianist sites and ethnonationalist sites is a useful framework to understand contemporary online debates, but this binary is simplistic as it assumes that both groups are monolithic, their conversations are self-contained, and that they do not communicate across the online discursive aisle. In reality, there are constant intra- and inter-group dissensions as well as trends towards coalescing around a small number of narratives. The debates have features of bipolarity but also trends towards multipolarity are evident.

this prism, the online debates over elections,⁴³ ethnic grievances,⁴⁴ ownership of Addis Ababa,⁴⁵ the killing of Hachalu,⁴⁶ the imprisonment of Jawar,⁴⁷ or the ongoing political and humanitarian crisis in Tigray,⁴⁸ or the violent flareup in Amhara⁴⁹ should better be seen in connection with, rather than in isolation from, such deeply entrenched questions over nation and state building, belonging, but also resource sharing.

Addressing Ethiopia's current challenges requires a reckoning with its complicated past, and a deep probing of its cultural and political identity. The challenge has been the failure of political discourse, which itself is rooted in Ethiopia's intellectual crisis. The poverty of ideas is compounded further by the polarization of discourse. Both offline and online conversations are plagued by partisanship which increasingly assumes an ethnic character and adopts intolerant, sectarian language. There is no denying the fact that there are many instances of, and opportunities for, cross-"border" conversations and the adoption of more unifying or even universalistic forms of politics and discourse. A good case in point is the detention and trial of Zone 9 bloggers⁵⁰ or the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD),⁵¹

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- 43 Felix Horne, "Dispatches: Alarm Bells for Ethiopia's 100% Election Victory," *Human Rights Watch*, June 23, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/23/dispatches-alarm-bells-ethiopias-100-election-victory>.
 - 44 Tom Wilson, "Ethnic Violence in Ethiopia has forced nearly 3 million people from their homes," *Human Rights Watch*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/23/dispatches-alarm-bells-ethiopias-100-election-victory>.
 - 45 Tom Gardiner, "Ethiopians are having a tense debate over who really owns Addis Ababa," *Quartz Africa*, July 6, 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/1022806/ethiopians-oromos-are-asserting-their-rights-for-addis-ababa-or-finfinne/>.
 - 46 BBC News, "Hachalu Hundessa: Ethiopian singer's death unrest killed 166," BBC News, July 5, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53298845>.
 - 47 Elias Meseret, "Ethiopia charges prominent opposition figure with terrorism," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/ethiopia-charges-prominent-opposition-figure-with-terrorism/2020/09/19/52249eb0-fa6c-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd_story.html.
 - 48 Nicholas Bariyo and Gabriele Steinhauser, "Ethiopia: What We Know About the War in the Tigray Region," *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 2020.
 - 49 International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara," ICC Briefing No 194, November 16 (2023) <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b194-ethiopias-ominous-new-war-amhara>.
 - 50 Gagliardone et al., *Mechachal*, 10.
 - 51 Elias Meseret, "Ethiopia blasts Trump remark that Egypt will 'blow up' dam," Associated Press, October 24, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/>

which garnered intense solidarity from a wide spectrum of Ethiopia's online communities. However, partisanship has solidified online, which itself is reflective of increasingly polarized offline politics in the country.

In the following, I use the discussion that emerged following the killing of Hachalu in 2020 and the current crisis in Tigray to illustrate Ethiopia's contemporary political conundrum and how online debates help to entrench one-dimensional positions rather than encourage discussions across the political spectrum. Both crises are seen and interpreted through a simplistic binary, as a struggle between two opposing forces and visions: the federalist (represented by the regions) versus the unitarist (the central government).

The death of Hachalu Hundessa, a prominent Oromo musician and activist, on June 29, 2020, was followed by a bout of killings and destruction in Addis Ababa, the capital city, and several towns and cities in Oromia, the country's largest regional state. More than two hundred people were killed, many in gruesome ways; property with an estimated value of hundreds of millions was destroyed; over ten thousand people were displaced. The government apprehended the alleged killers and imprisoned a number of prominent political opposition leaders (notably Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, Eskinder Nega, and Lidetu Ayalew) and journalists.⁵² The crackdown also led to the arrests of over nine thousand people suspected of involvement in the unfolding crisis. The list included security officials and members of local administrations. On November 4, 2021, the federal government launched an offensive in Tigray, after it had accused the regional ruling party—Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)—of attacking a government military base. The crisis caused a huge humanitarian and political crisis and threatened the stability of the country. The international community was particularly incensed by reports of atrocities including rape and arbitrary killings which could amount to war crimes.⁵³

In the meantime, however, another battle is raging on, both inside the country and more importantly within the diaspora. This is a battle to frame

donald-trump-ethiopia-egypt-abiy-ahmed-sudan-4a71496ab630c5cc6db-d242be894d24a.

- 52 Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: Opposition Figures Held Without Charge," August 15, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/15/ethiopia-opposition-figures-held-without-charge>.
- 53 Declan Walsh and Abdi Latif Dahir, "Why is Ethiopia at War With Itself?," *New York Times*, November 5, 2020 (updated February 12, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-conflict-explained.html>. The outbreak of another bloody conflict in Amhara, the second largest region, since April 2023 adds a new layer to Ethiopia's seemingly intractable list of crises, with a potential to drag the country back into a cycle of war and violence.

narratives and reap the political capital that may come in the process. For the government and its supporters, the killing of Hachalu and the crisis in Tigray (and the ongoing violence in Amhara) are little more than attempts to derail the democratization process, destabilize the country, and destroy the federation. For the opposition in Oromia and Tigray (and Amhara) and their sympathizers, the incidents are part of a systematic effort by reactionary forces to centralize power and destroy the federal system.⁵⁴ More broadly, the battle to frame the narrative over the crisis in Tigray or the killing of Hachalu and the turmoil that ensued could be seen as a microcosm of an enduring struggle over reinventing what Ethiopia is and what it wants to be. Accounts of the most recent tragedies, like those before, and the debates that followed often gloss over the human cost of violence, diverge considerably, and are often presented in a language of binary opposition, that is, as a contest between federalists versus unitarists (*abadawiyān*).

The supposed opposition between federalists and unitarists is, however, little more than obfuscation. The premise of this binary is that there is a monolithic camp of federalists or that federalists share a unity of vision and strategy. More often, they are presented as a force in defense of a multinational federal Ethiopia although they differ—at times radically—over the scope and content of the federal structure. The same assumption is applied for the “unitarists” who are seen as revanchists working to restore the “old assimilationist” Ethiopia. For many members of the commenting class in and outside of the country, the “federalist-unitarist” binary is a prism of choice: a privileged, albeit selective, perspective to observe, define, and interpret Ethiopia’s complicated and entangled political and ideological struggles.⁵⁵

This view of the current state of politics is at best reductionist and at worst disingenuous. The federalist versus unitarian opposition is too static and restrictive to encapsulate the full spectrum of political positions in the nation. Both the federalist and unitarian constellations are never monolithic; they are articulated variously and account for political organizations that are disparate.⁵⁶

54 Simon Marks, “Ethiopian Opposition, Prime Minister Accuse Each Other of Power Grab,” *VOA*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopian-opposition-prime-minister-accuse-each-other-power-grab>.

55 Katharine Hourled and Maggie Fick, “Analysis: How attempts to unify Ethiopia may be deepening its divides, say analysts,” *Reuters*, November 27, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-unity-analysis/analysis-how-attempts-to-unify-ethiopia-may-be-deepening-its-divides-say-analysts-idUSKBN2870PU>.

56 Farouk Chothia, “Ethiopia’s Tigray Crisis: Why Nobel laureate Abiy Ahmed sent his troops to battle,” *BBC News*, December 6, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55145827>.

One can argue that federalist vs unitarist categories are used in the service of a political objective, which is to unify groups by homogenizing different positions, at times through the use of intimidation and violence. The same objective of making, marking, firming up, and affirming boundaries is also served by other equally simplistic, though politically potent us vs. them binaries: between extremists versus moderates; oppressors (the north) versus oppressed (the south); civilized versus uncivilized; chauvinists (*teme-ke-tegnoch*) versus narrow nationalists (*tebaboch*); and natives (*nebaroch*) and settlers (*sefarimoch*). However, what such oppositions also do in the process is impoverish political and intellectual discourse while hiding other critical questions. In extreme cases, they construct, legitimate, and perpetuate practices of discrimination, persecution, and at times ethnic cleansing. In contemporary Ethiopia, people are being forced to support one of these discourses and align with one of those groups. People who are considered opponents are otherized, at times animalized (using terms like dogs, donkeys, hyenas, insects), discriminated against, evicted, have their property destroyed, and, frequently, are killed.

Ethiopia is witnessing several overlapping battles, raging simultaneously in both discourse and practice, at home and abroad. Increasingly, they are less to do with issues of “distribution.” Although the threat of a Hobbesian “war of all against all” (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) or a descent into ethnocracy is unrealistic, at least at the present, one will be hard pressed not to discern a concerning trend—that a politics that began with a promise of collective liberation and empowerment is deteriorating into a rivalry for control and domination, with an outrageously high human cost.

By Way of Conclusion: In Search of a “Third Space” of Enunciation

The communal violence and targeted killings that followed the death of Hachalu and the crisis in Tigray, Amhara, and other parts of the country are eerily reminiscent of tragedies that occurred in other parts of the world. Rooted in identity politics, these recurring carnages show the excesses of inter-communal and intra-state violence while exposing the limitations of the state’s capacity to prevent such calamities occurring in the first place. The federal experiment is under serious stress and the constitution, once touted as a panacea, is now being seen by a growing number of people as a recipe for disaster. Reversing the descent towards catastrophe requires a fundamental rethink on many levels.

National dialogue and reconciliation are needed. Ethiopia’s salvation, which probably requires a new social contract, might be found somewhere

in between the two dominant, often totalizing, paradigms: the “ethnonationalist”/federalist and the “pan-Ethiopianist/unitarist. However, such a political exercise cannot succeed if the country fails to reform the current state of intellectual and political discourse in the country. It can begin by recognizing that there is a deep intellectual crisis, typified by intensely partisan scholarship and polarized narratives, along with a chronic poverty of ideas. While asking questions that are truly important, Ethiopians need to develop discourses that show and celebrate the nuances, complexities, and entanglements of their social and political lives. A politics informed by these understandings and freed from the limitations of simplistic binaries is capable of showing a pathway to a future of collective emancipation and empowerment.

The past can serve as a guide in this important endeavor, but the way it is recovered, interpreted, and applied matters. The trend today is to compartmentalize the past, to selectively remember and forget history, all in the service of current and future political aspirations. What Ethiopia needs instead is a critical reckoning with the past, both its agonies and glories, which involves accepting this richly entangled past and its complicated legacies as Ethiopians’ collective biography. It also includes making amends. All this requires a revolution of conscience, of intellectual and political will but one that is needed, urgently at that, for a deep moral and political renewal. The core objective of the national reckoning must be to create a country that is fair, free, and inclusive, one that is at peace with itself and with the world. What is needed is not simple remembrances but critical reflection, radical empathy, self-reflexive understanding, and a political compromise to fight the corrosive powers of polarization. Ethiopians can begin to revisit their past, critically engage in its complicated inheritances, and learn from their traditions of resistance against tyranny and oppression.

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Chapter 12

Songs of *Sidet*¹

An Insight into Ethiopia's Culture of Migration through Song Lyrics Analysis

Hewan Girma

Introduction

As a ubiquitous form of cultural production, music, and more specifically the study of song lyrics, provides a unique entry point in the study of Ethiopian migration. Music not only allows for storytelling and the communication of emotion in a visceral manner, but it generally cuts across generations as it is a form of mass media pertinent to everyone from the very young to the very old. Moreover, music is egalitarian from the perspective of consumers as the means and methods of accessing and listening to music have drastically changed and increased in the last several decades due to improving technologies. As a widespread expressive cultural practice central to social life, music is simultaneously a reflection of the attitudes, beliefs, and value systems of a society as well as a force that can shape and exert influence over cultural perspectives.² In the tradition of ethnomusicology,³ social scientists can therefore systematically analyze music (its content, production, reception, etc.) as an entry point into a culture.

1 The author would like to thank David Aarons for suggesting the title of the paper.

2 Turino, *Music as social life*.

3 Merriam and Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*.

Elsewhere,⁴ I have discussed the significance of examining the culture of migration that permeates Ethiopian society using various forms of cultural production⁵ in order to provide a greater depth to our understanding. Indeed, “there are very few studies relating Ethiopian politics, history, and society to popular culture.”⁶ The Ethiopian politics of music (production, lyrics, performance, dissemination, censorship) is an understudied but potentially infinitely fruitful area of inquiry for social scientists. However, by and large, music remains “one of the most neglected themes”⁷ and “among the least explored topics in Ethiopian studies.”⁸ In effect, “popular music should give a nuanced understanding of the difference between history as narrated by the political elite and history as lived and experienced by the population.”⁹ While Ethiopia’s rich musical heritage has received only scant scholarly attention and there are still paths to take within it, recent works have made important contributions in this field.¹⁰ As a field in its infancy, there are significant gaps in the scholarship on contemporary Ethiopian music, and even the “existing scholarly literature remains confined to limited themes.”¹¹ Shelemay, one of the foremost ethnomusicologists specializing in Ethiopian music, states that “while Ethiopian concepts of migration . . . have changed over the course of time, . . . the condition of exile has given rise to rich Ethiopian song repertoires.”¹² Elsewhere, she argues that “music has been used . . . to better understand Ethiopian society past and present . . . and to take stock of the challenges of displacement and resettlement in a globalizing world.”¹³ Indeed, this chapter heeds Shelemay’s calls to “approach the musical subject matter more critically.”¹⁴

4 H. Girma, “Language, Culture and Hierarchies of Migration,” 79–96.

5 Although the focus of this study is music and song lyrics that deal directly with the Ethiopian migration experience, this is not the only arena or medium for fruitful exploration. We can also use film and other forms of media to scrutinize how Ethiopians depict the migration experience.

6 Marye, “Ityoṗyawinnät and Addis Abäba’s Popular Music Scene,” 96.

7 Simeneh, “Scholarship on Ethiopian Music,” 19.

8 Simeneh, “Scholarship on Ethiopian Music,” 31.

9 Marye, “Ityoṗyawinnät and Addis Abäba’s Popular Music Scene,” 97.

10 See Marye, “Ityoṗyawinnät and Addis Abäba’s Popular Music Scene”; Shelemay, “Musical scholarship and Ethiopian studies”; Simeneh, “Scholarship on Ethiopian Music”; and Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

11 Simeneh, “Scholarship on Ethiopian Music,” 19.

12 Shelemay, “Love From Afar,” 4.

13 Shelemay, “Musical scholarship and Ethiopian studies,” 183.

14 Shelemay, “Musical scholarship and Ethiopian studies,” 187.

In this chapter, I examine the intersections of Ethiopian music and migration.¹⁵ Looking at migration through the prism of music allows us to tell multilayered stories, to shed light on a unique aspect of the migration experience using a medium of popular culture. Through systematic analysis of Amharic song lyrics which focus on migration (i.e., *Sidet*) as their main theme, this chapter gives an insight into the Ethiopian cultural understanding of migration. I explore cultural perceptions of migration in light of the growing global Ethiopian diaspora and the importance of migration for Ethiopian populations in recent decades. More specifically, I discuss the prevailing dissonance and ambivalence in migration-themed popular song lyrics. Rather than presenting a one-dimensional account that limits understanding, this chapter will seek to uncover the richness and complexity of the perceptions of migration in migration-themed Ethiopian/Amharic songs. In essence, this chapter presents an ethnography of migration through the lens of music and popular song lyrics.

By and large, Amharic songs of *Sidet* reveal a contradictory orientation, celebrating migrations and migrants on one hand and lamenting their uncertain fates on the other. The resulting dissonance is a key aspect of this analysis, in which migration is not perceived as a clear-cut positive or negative from the perspective of musical cultural production. Although this study does not present a longitudinal perspective, the dynamic or evolving nature of migration perceptions has undoubtedly been affected by changing circumstances around Ethiopian migratory movements.

A Short Note on Methodology

While I am by no means an avid Ethiopian popular music consumer, my immersive research on Ethiopian return and circular migration over the span of close to a decade has inadvertently led me to investigate the intersections between music and migration. During semi-structured interviews with ninety-four Ethiopian migrants and non-migrant kin conducted between 2011 and 2019, respondents often provided unprompted quotes or references to popular Amharic songs and singers while discussing their own migrations journeys. The analysis in this chapter represents the song lyrics most often quoted or referenced to me by my interview subjects. The identity of the respondents and the stage of their lives in which they have migrated have undoubtedly narrowed both the musical selection and the artists' complex cultural take on migration.

15 Baily and Collyer, "Introduction: Music and Migration," 167–82; Kiwan and Meinhof, "Music and Migration," 3–20.

The research method for this study is the systematic analysis of Ethiopian song lyrics which focus on migration as their main theme, released between 2000 and 2020. The two most common methods interrogating the links between music and migration involve examining musical productions by migrant communities (in the form of diasporic cultural production) or investigating migration-themed music regardless of the place of production. Both of these methods provide an insight into perceptions of migration through a cultural lens. Moreover, the study of song lyrics is one way to approach the issue of migration, attuned to its different processes and representations. Perhaps Ethiopian songs about migration are not as ubiquitous as love songs, but it is a strong theme. Subsumed under the everyday as well as the nationalistic and patriotic genre, Ethiopian songs about *Sidet* can elucidate local and diasporic perceptions of the migration phenomenon. In this study, I employ textual analysis of popular song lyrics as they can serve as a rich source of content, an entry point and a mirror into different aspects of culture.

Investigating the theme of migration through song lyrics has several advantages. Studying song lyrics provides an unparalleled advantage and insight into a culture inasmuch as “lyrics are everything in Ethiopian music.”¹⁶ More specifically, the study of music and song lyrics can shed light on contested processes of social transformation such as Ethiopian migration and represent the viewpoints of a particular time period and on a particular issue. Song lyrics provide a rich source of content with high descriptive value and are, for the most part, widely available and easily accessible. Despite the fact that we can extract meaningful and multi-layered information, song lyrics have received relatively scant attention¹⁷ from Ethiopian and Ethiopianist social scientists.

Analyzing song lyrics is a form of content textual analysis, a common tool used in communication and media studies.¹⁸ We can glean significant social information embedded in the song lyrics. Textual analysis is useful for examining patterns in a systematic manner in texts of various formats. Through lyric text analysis, we can study the use of passive versus active voices, the use of particular vocabulary, semantics, etc. Instead of relying on word frequencies (as is the standard in textual analysis), I carried out a “keyword in context” approach as the meaning of a word depends on the surrounding text and the complexity of language. Based on the reading of the lyrics as text, I make inferences that go beyond a subjective reading of the material. In the anthropological tradition of “thick description,”¹⁹ I aim to unpack the lay-

16 Gardner, “Teddy Afro, Ethiopia’s biggest pop star.”

17 Getahun, “Sədāt, Migration, and Refugeeism,” 341–59.

18 Titon, “Textual Analysis or Thick Description?,” 75–85.

19 Geertz, “Thick Description,” 143–68.

ered meanings in the text, reading culture through song lyrics. In a way, this is interpretative scholarship. I transcribed the song lyrics verbatim in Amharic to glean the representations of the migration experience. I undertook a systematic reading and coding of the text (lyrics) highlighting repeated words (word frequency) and prevailing sentiments about migration. I translated the Amharic songs into English (foregrounding meaning over style) in the final writing of this chapter. The lyrics of the songs (sometimes excerpts and sometimes the full lyrics) are presented in both their original Amharic and my English translation so that the multilingual reader can follow along in the analysis and draw their own conclusions.

As this is a qualitative content analysis, I have focused less on generating a statistical coding schema, but rather on intentionality, implication, and connotation. Of course, music is more than song lyrics and encompasses different sounds and styles. We can therefore study stylistic and emotional differences in addition to the lyrics. When available, I have supplemented the lyrical text analysis with an overview of any accompanying visual material (music videos or visual clips released by the artists). The manifest content of song lyrics is intended to be consumed by a large group of people of varying backgrounds. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to study the reception and subsequent effects of the selected songs, the effects of these popular songs on the general psyche of Ethiopians and their understanding of migration would be a great avenue for future research. In regard to the boundaries of this analysis, here I present here a selective sample of song lyrics. Language is one of the limitations as I only examine song lyrics in Amharic (one of the main Ethiopian languages). However, similar songs and themes can be found in songs in Afan Oromo, Somali, Tigrigna, and other languages. Moreover, I have not systematically analyzed all Amharic songs about migration released between 2000 and 2020.

Table 12.1 lists some popular migration-themed Amharic songs released in the period in question, most post the Ethiopian millennium²⁰ by Ethiopian artists located in the home country and abroad. At the very least, we can see from this short list that migration is a theme that has compelled scores of Ethiopian artists to sing about it over the past twenty years. These songs provide a frame of reference with rich textual data to analyze perceptions of migration in Ethiopian society, both at home and abroad. Older songs include “እኔም አገር አለኝ” (Enem Ager Alegn; I Also Have A Country, ca. 1983) and “ሃገሬ” (Hagerae; My Country, ca. 1999) by popular artist Aster Aweke.

20 Ethiopia follows the Julian calendar (as opposed to the European Gregorian calendar) which means that the Ethiopian year falls 7–8 years behind the European (world standard). Therefore, the Ethiopian millennium was in the year 2007 according to the Gregorian calendar.

Table 12.1: Selective list of popular Amharic migration themed songs and their respective artists

Artist	Year	Song Title Amharic	Song Title Translation
Hamelmal Abate	2001	ስደት	Exile
Gedeon Daniel	2005	ላጽናናሽ	Let Me Comfort You
Teddy Afro	2006	ስደት	Exile
Abdu Kiar	2006	የከዳማ እናቱን	He Who Abandons His Mother
Gossaye Tesfaye	2007	ወገኔ ተሰብሰብ	Gather My People (Come Back Home)
Gizachew Teshome	2008	ስደት	Exile
Tigist Shibabaw	2008	አገሬ ቤቴ	My Country, My Home
Tibebu Workiye	2012	ስደት	Exile
Anteneh Worku & Tsehay Wolde	2012	ይብቃ ስደት	Enough Exile
Habtamu Abraham	2012	ስደት	Exile
Betty Dire	2013	ስደት	Exile
One House Team	2013	በቃ ጥረኝ	Call Me Back
Getu Omahire (aka Getahun Mitiku)	2013	ከቤት ወደ እስር ቤት	From Home to Prison
Abeba Desalegn	2013	ስደት	Exile
Mikiyas Chernet	2013	እማምዬ	Dear Mother
Abel Mulugeta	2014	ስደት	Exile
Madigo Afework	2014	ስደት	Exile
Tigist Afework	2014	ስደት ለምኔ	Exile for What?
Teddy Afro	2015	አልሄድ አለ	My Feet Refuse to Move
Abeselom Bihonegn	2015	ወይ ስደት ወገኔ	Oh Exile, My People
Jacky Gosee	2015	ሀቅ	Truth
Temesgen Gebre Egziabher (aka Temu)	2015	ስደቴን አታስታውሰኝ	Don't Remind Me of My Exile
Yegna	2015	ስደት ስማ በለው	Exile, Hear (He Who Has Ears)
One House Team	2015	ኢትዮጵያን አደራ	Take Care of Ethiopia

Table 12.1: Selective list of popular Amharic migration themed songs and their respective artists (*continued*)

Artist	Year	Song Title Amharic	Song Title Translation
Abate Berihun	2015	ስደት ይብቃ	Enough Exile
Abebe Teka & Henok Ekubamichael	2018	ወደ ክብር ምድረ	To the Land of Honor
Girma Nigatu	2020	ስደት ክፉ	Exile Is Awful

In the following, I analyze the lyrics of four songs from the list above. These songs, which were the most often referenced by interview respondents, are as follows (in chronological order): “የከዳማ እናቱን” (Yekedama Enatun; He Who Abandons His Mother, 2006) by Abdu Kiar; “አገሬ ቤቴ” (Hagere Bete; My Country, My Home, 2008) by Tigist Shibabaw; “እማምዬ” (Emamaye; Dear Mother, 2013) by Mikiyas Chernet; and “አልሄድ አለ” (Alhed Ale; My Feet Refuse to Move, 2015) by Teddy Afro. Although these four songs are the focus of this chapter, I also reference further songs to strengthen my argument on the significance of migration in contemporary Ethiopian culture.

Four Artists, Four Songs

“የከዳማ እናቱን” (He Who Abandons His Mother, 2006) by Abdu Kiar

ቤት ያፈራውን ያቅሟን ሰራርታ
ትጠብቃለች ልጆችን ጠርታ ካሉበት ቦታ
አንተ ፈጣሪ ጸሎቷን ስማ ስደት ልጆችን ሁሌ እየቀማ
ባሉበት ቦታ አሳካላቸው ምስኪኗ ኢትዮጵያ ባይኖር ትያቸው

[She gives all that she has, working to her best
Waiting for her children to return from wherever they are.
Please Creator, listen to her prayers, Exile has ripped away her children
Bless them wherever they are, let poor Ethiopia see them with her own
eyes.]

ያልገቡበት የለም
 ሙቀትና ብርዱን ችለው በዚች አለም
 እኛ ቀን ታልፋለች እያሉ በማለም
 ስትጣረ ያልመጡት ጠልተውሽ አይደለም
 እናቱን የሚጠላ ካንኛ አልተፈጠረም
 የከዳማ እናቱን እንጃ ሐበሻነቱን

[There is nowhere they haven't gone
 Tolerating the heat and cold in this world,
 Dreaming that this day will pass.
 It is not because they hate you that they did not answer when you called
 None were created from you who hate their mother.
 If any deny their mother, I doubt their *Habesha*-ness (their Ethiopian-ness).]

ምንም ቢቸግራት በማንም አልቀደር እናቴስ እናት ናት
 ደግሞ ለእናትነት ማን ይወዳደራል እስቲ ካዱ ገነት

[No matter how poor, none can substitute for my mother.
 As for mothering, none compares to *Kadu Genet* (Ethiopia).]

አቤት ብታያቸው እማማ
 እህልና ውሃ ማርና ወተታቸው
 አርቴፊሻል ሆነ እንዳለ ኑሯቸው
 ዘመናዊ ባርነት ስላስገደዳቸው
 ዜግነት ቀይረው ካዱኝ አትበያቸው
 በወረቀት የሰው በደም ያንኛ ናቸው

[If only *Emama* (mother) can see them, their food, water, honey, and
 milk
 It is all artificial, all of their life, modern day slavery forcing them.
 Do not accuse them of abandoning you by changing their citizenship.
 Their papers are foreign but by blood, they are still yours.]

አሜሪካዊ ቢሉት ጋሼን አይቀይሩት
 አውሮፓዊም ቢሏት እታለም አይገርማት
 አረብ አገር ለፍታ ሚጡዬ ለናቷ
 ምንም ምንም ቢሉኝ እኔንም አይቀይሩኝ

[Even if you call him “American” *Gashe*²¹ will not change.
 Even if you call her “European” *Etalem*²² will not be astonished.
 Young girl working hard in Arab countries, it is all for her mother.
 No matter what you say, nothing will change me either.]

21 Gashe is a respectful term for an older man.

22 Etalem is a respectful term for an older woman.

Abdu Kiar is a popular singer who got his start in Ethiopia but maintained his popularity even after migrating. He first moved to Saudi Arabia where he lived for six years working as a low-skill worker in a bakery, car wash, and elsewhere. He then moved to the US where he gained advanced degrees working as an IT professional. The song “የከዳማ እናቱን” (He Who Abandons His Mother) was released upon his initial migration to Saudi Arabia, when his fans accused him of abandoning his home country. When analyzing song lyrics, it is important to be aware of the timing and context of when a song is produced and disseminated, as the socioeconomic and political context of the cultural production can be illuminating to interpretation. It is reasonable to interrogate whether the artist's own living situation had an impact in his writing these particular lyrics. Can this song be thought of as a sort of apology? Or an explanation of his own extenuating circumstances? The very last verse of this song is particularly telling, as the artist seems to be reassuring his fans that he will remain unchanged despite his migration.

In this song, we see the theme of dispersal and a contrasting of the conditions in the host/destination country. The artist refers to the differences in climate between heat and cold as one of the many challenges that Ethiopian migrants encounter outside of their home country. Migration is also presented as a transient situation. The home country is represented as one's mother, not to be denied regardless of where one lives. Life outside of the home country is also presented as “artificial” to be contrasted with the “organic” or “real” life in the home nation. Moreover, Abdu Kiar differentiates between citizenship on paper and real (blood) belonging. He further highlights the different destination locations of Ethiopian migrants²³: US, Europe, and the Middle East. Furthermore, it is revealing that this singer equates migration with modern day slavery. In a line at the end of the first stanza, he prays for Ethiopian migrants to be blessed wherever they are. Despite the condition of migration, change of nationality (ie: legal belonging), Abdu Kiar sings eloquently about migrants' emotional attachment to the motherland.

“አገሬ ቤቴ” (My Country, My Home, 2008) by Tigist Shibabaw

ለስደት ኑሮ ከአገር መውጣት
መኖሪያ የለን የአባት እርስት
በስራ ደክመን ጠዋትም ማታ
እንኖጣለን የለንም ፋታ

23 See Belloni, “Cosmologies and Migration.”

[Leaving one's country for a life in exile,
Don't have a place to live or a father's inheritance,
Exhausted, laboring morning to night
We constantly run without a break.]

ዝናብ ዘነበ ክረምትም መጣ
መጠለያችን ቤትም ብናጣ
በሃገር ናፍቆት ተንገብግበናል
በአምላክ እርዳታ ይህው አለና

[It is raining, winter came.
We possess no shelter, no house
Of homesickness, we are ablaze.
We are only here by the grace of God.]

እቤቴን ላጽዳ ሳይመሽብኝ
የባእድ ኑሮ ጊዜ አይሰጠኝ
በሰው አገር ላይ መንከራተት
በእግሬ እጃዝላሁ ቀንም ሰንበት

[Let me clean my home before nightfall.
Life in exile is without rest.
Wandering in a foreign land
On foot, I roam all week long.]

አሁ እላለሁ ግራ ሲገባኝ
ደህና ዋልሽ የሚል ጓደኛም የለኝ
ደብዳቤ ልላክ በፓስታ ቤት
ለዘመዶቼ ልግለጽ ናፍቆቴን

[I say ho-hum when I get confused,
I don't even have a friend who asks how I am doing.
Let me send a letter by post.
Let me express my longing and affection to my relatives.]

The late Tigist Shibabaw, sister to the globally renowned Gigi (Ejigayehu Shibabaw), was part of the Harlem-based fusion band Bole2Harlem which mixes Ethiopian music with American hip hop. The group's name merges two geographies: Bole, the upscale neighborhood in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where the sole international airport is located (thus a significant place for migrants) and Harlem, the New York City neighborhood known for its African American musical heritage. Bole2Harlem is known for its upbeat music that merges different styles and is emblematic of an innovative diaspora musical group.

A close reading of the lyrics of “አገሬ ቤቴ” (My Country, My Home) reveals threads highlighting a sense of loss, homesickness, nostalgia, dispossession, and disconnection from the perspective of the migrant. The singer

equates the migrant's life with an economically motivated rat race, toiling and laboring without rest. She further highlights a gratefulness to God, invoking the divine in the unforgiving life in exile. The migrant is presented as a homeless wanderer roaming in new lands without anyone caring for their wellbeing.

“እማማዬ” (Dear Mother, 2013) by Mikiyas Chernet

ተው ተው ተው ልቤ ቁረጥና ወደ ሀገርህ ግባ
ተው ግባ ነገ ዛሬ እያልክ ተው ግባ ተው አታታለኝ ተው ግባ
የሰው ሀገር ኑሮ ተው ግባ ስለሆኝ

[Please, my heart, decide and go back to your country.
Don't fool me saying today tomorrow.
I am tired of life in someone else's country.]

ዱር ባሕሩን አቋርጬ
እናት አባቴን ሁሉን ትቼ
አቤት በወሬ ሲያምር ስደት
መቼ ይመስላል ጉድ ያለበት
ያዙኝ አልያዙኝ ሁሉ ጭንቀት
አረ ምን አለ የሚያስከፋ እንደ ስደት
አሁንስ ስደት አመመኝ
እናት ሀገሬ ናፈቅሺኝ

[I crossed forests and oceans, left behind my father, mother and all.
Migration is nice only in theory, who would have thought it holds so
much calamity?
The worry of getting caught, oh there is nothing as sad as exile.
I am so tired of living in exile, I miss you so much my mother country.]

እማማዬ እኔስ ሀገሬ
እወድሻለሁ እናፍቅሻለሁ
ስደት ተግሳፅ ነው አስብሻለሁ
የትም የለም እንዳንቺ የለም
ከፍ ይበል ባንዲራሽ እስከ ዘላለም
እማማዬ የኔስ ሀገሬ

[My mother, my country, I love you, I miss you.
Exile is punishment and I think of you (mother country).
Nowhere is there anyone like you, there is none like you.
May your flag fly high forever more,
My mother, my country.]

በቃኝ ገባለሁ አገሬን እልና እነሳና
ቆይ ትንሽ ልስራ ደግሞ እላለሁ እንደገና

ይህ የሰው አገር አለው ነገር
 እንደው እግር ይዞ እዛው የሚያስቀር አለው ነገር
 በቁርጡ ሀገሬ እስክግባ
 የማያልፍ የለም እስከ ይሁና
 ብቻ እለምንሃለሁ እጄን አንስቼ ፈጣሪዬ
 ሠርገና ሞቴን አደራ አድርገልኝ በሀገሬ

[Enough, I say, and decide to go back home,
 But then again commit to work some more.
 There is something about other people's countries
 Binding my feet, not letting me go
 Until I go back for real, even this will pass.
 But I plead with you my Creator raising my hands up high,
 May my wedding and death be in my own country.]

While his primary residence at the time of the song release was in Ethiopia, Mikiyas Cherenet sings like another artist living outside of the home country. In an interview with an Amharic news media source, he discussed how he penned these lyrics after numerous encounters with scores of Ethiopian irregular migrants in Europe. Although he has not directly experienced the type of migration challenges he sings about, he was touched by the stories he heard while touring. Mikiyas sings about the challenges of life in exile, particularly as an undocumented migrant. The protagonist in the song is having an internal debate, trying to convince himself to make the decision to return to the home country. He states that he is tired of “living in someone else’s country” away from his homeland.

The artist equates the destination country as always someone else’s. Belonging is therefore questioned, and migration is seen as a transitory position, where migrants do not fully integrate or permanently settle. This song also contrasts the dream of life as a migrant with reality. He describes the fear of encountering (immigration) authorities in the host country and being deported. He therefore paints migration as a sad, lamentable condition. The song highlights the disconnection of leaving behind family. This song is simultaneously aimed at Ethiopians in the diaspora as well as those in the homeland, particularly aspiring migrants.

This song is also full of national pride where the mother country cannot be acceptably compared to or equated with another. When imagined through musical space, the Ethiopian nation is portrayed as a woman, most often as a mother figure. Patriotism in popular culture is thus expressed as “love of Ethiopia.” In the very last verse, the artist expresses his desire that important life events (such as his wedding and his death) be ultimately held in his home country. In this portrayal, the host/destination country is intended only for work and not for (long-term) living.

The contrast between home and host nation in this song is also telling. This song advocates a return to the homeland, while at the same time acknowledging migrants' internal struggle between wanting to go back home but desiring to first accumulate wealth and resources. Mikiyas Chernet is alluding to the myth of return held onto by migrants everywhere. It is sometimes a psychological tool to assuage one's own guilt or discomfort in the host/destination nation. Perhaps the singer is espousing an unrealistic expectation that millions Ethiopians (and Ethiopian descendants) will repatriate back to the homeland. However, this does not change the idea that the homeland is often presented as ideal.

“አልሄድ አለ” (My Feet Refuse to Move, 2015) by Teddy Afro

እዩት ይህን ሰማይ ቀይ ኩታ መስሎ
 ሊሸኘኝ ማለዳ ይህና ሁን ብሎ
 ዛሬ ስል ነገ ስል ልቀይር ወይ ቦታ
 የቆረጠው ልቤ ደግሞ አመነታ
 ልሂድ ወይ ጨክኜ ልጓዝ በቃ ስንቄን ቋጥሬ
 ደሞ እንዳመሉ አልሄድ አለኝ እምቢ አለኝ እግሬ

[Look at the red sky, ready to see me off, wishing me well.
 I said, today or tomorrow I will change locations (I will migrate).
 My resolute heart is wavering:
 Shall I be courageous and leave? Shall I pack my bags?
 But as usual, my feet refuse to move.]

አልሄድ አለ እግሬ አልሄድ አለ . . .
 ዛሬ ስል ነገ ልሂዳ፣ ጨክኜ
 ደግሞ አመነታሁ ሁለት ልብ ሆኜ
 ዞር ብዬ ሳየው ያገሬን መንገድ አትሂድ እያለ ያስቀረኝ ጀመር

[My feet have refused to move.
 I say, today or tomorrow I will leave decidedly.
 Yet I hesitate, I am of two hearts:
 When I look back at my country's road, it tells me not to go, keeping me
 here.]

ጠዋት ነግቶ በማለዳ ልሂድ ጨክኜ
 ደሞ አመነታሁ ውስጤ ፈራ ሁለት ልብ ሆኜ
 ማንስ እንደ ሀገር እንደ ወንዜ እንደ ቀያችን
 ሰው አርጊን እዛው ሰለም ሆነሽ ተይ ሀገራችን
 ሰው አርጊን እዛው የትም ሳንሄድ ተይ ሀገራችን

[In the early morning I will go unequivocally.
 Yet I waver, I am afraid, I am of two hearts:

Who is like my own country? My own river? My own neighborhood?
 Make me be somebody, here in my own country when you are peaceful.
 Let us be somebody, here in our own country, without going anywhere.]

Teddy Afro (official name: Tewodros Kassahun) is the most well-known Ethiopian artist in the contemporary world both at home and abroad. As a talented singer and songwriter who repeatedly picks up the theme of Ethiopianness in his music, he is a cultural and political icon with unmatched cultural impact and millions of fans. He is recognized and alternatively loved or hated for his brand of patriotism and national pride that is the hallmark of his music. He is considered “a symbol of political resistance in today’s Ethiopia.”²⁴ In fact, in one study on Ethiopian popular music, Teddy Afro was “mentioned by every interviewee and in every single questionnaire and interview throughout the research.”²⁵

Musicians like Teddy Afro provide lyrics that are rich in idiom, highly allusive, and play on words. “አልሄድ አለ” (My Feet Refuse to Move) plays on the symbol of rootedness, as Teddy Afro is heard debating whether to migrate or not. The song details his hesitation and his internal struggle. Taken literally, Teddy Afro sings that his feet will not move; figuratively, however, he states that he will not migrate as nothing compares to the homeland. He would prefer to be successful without having to migrate. His feet refuse to move, so he remains staying rooted in the home country despite the socioeconomic and political challenges he faces. This rootedness can be contrasted with the uprooting of migrants who have left the homeland in search of greener pastures abroad. At the same time, this song highlights the internal and even societal struggle in staying put versus leaving. This song shows the struggle or desire to migrate, but the artist ultimately decides against it. Like many others, he argues that it is better to stay within the home country.

In contrast to “አልሄድ አለ” Teddy Afro’s earlier migration-themed song, “ስድት” (Sidet; Exile, 2006), shows a more complicated relationship and brings up the common question of migrants returning to the homeland empty-handed.²⁶ This earlier song depicts an individual who has migrated after much supplication and feels stuck in the host country, unable to achieve his dream of financial success. The protagonist in the song desires to return home with accumulated wealth without which his migration becomes meaningless. This song is less about outright condemning migration but

24 Marye, “Ityopyawinnät and Addis Abäba’s Popular Music Scene,” 104.

25 Ibid.

26 For a detailed treatment of this song, see Getahun “Sädät, Migration, and Refugeism.”

highlights migrants' calculations using migration as a means to an end. Below is an excerpt²⁷ from Teddy Afro's song "ስደት":

በስለት ውጥቼ ለምኜ ታቦት
ምን ይገዢ ልመለስ ወደ እናቴ ቤት
ትርጉም ያጣብኛል የስደት ኑሮዬ
አንድም ነገር ሳሊዝ ብመለስ ሀገሬ

[I left after many prayers and supplication.
What do I bring back to my mother's house?
My life as a migrant becomes meaningless
If I return to my country empty handed.]

In this excerpt, we see the theme of return and particularly the pain of returning empty-handed. It portrays migrants as individuals who left their home countries for a purpose "after many prayers and supplication" but did not accumulate the expected wealth. They are therefore stuck in this liminal migrant position of wanting to return but finding it shameful to return empty-handed. This inevitably brings in the question around the source of some of the hostility towards migration: the fear of not succeeding even after the sacrifices of migration.

Selected Additional Examples

In this section, although I do not present full lyrics such as in the examples above, I provide additional excerpts of popular migration-themed song lyrics (all listed in chronological order in table 12.1). There are quite a few examples of songs that pick up the theme of migration. For instance, in his 2007 song "ወገኔ ተሰብስብ" (Gather My People [Come Back Home]), initially sung on the occasion of the Ethiopian millennium, Gossaye Tesfaye admonishes all Ethiopians from near and afar to gather together in Ethiopia, not just for the festivities of the millennium, but on a more permanent basis. The millennium was infused with meaning,²⁸ and this particular singer chose this momentous occasion to call for a return to the homeland. It is a song of supplication sung in the particular context of the Ethiopian millennium, which elucidates the meaning of the lyrics. (It should not be surprising that songs about return were often referenced to me by my interview respondents).

27 Gardner, "Teddy Afro, Ethiopia's biggest pop star."

28 Bekerie, "The Ethiopian Millennium and its Historical and Cultural Meanings," 23–31.

ወገኔ ተሰብስብ
በሀገርህ ምድርህ ላይ እንዲሁን አለምህ
ካለህበት አገር እሩቅ ሳትል ቅርብ ነው
የአንድ እናት ልጆች ነን እንተሰሰብ

[Gather my people, assemble,
Let your happy life be in your country, in your land.
Near or far, come from wherever you are,
We are children of the same mother, let us care for one another.]

Another song worth mentioning is Tibebu Workiye's "ስደት" (Sidet; Exile, 2012), in which he discusses the process of leaving the homeland with hope and the dream of returning one day.

ስደት ጉዞዬን መለየቴን አስቦ
ዘመድ ጎረቤት በእንባ ተሰብስቦ
አልቅሶ ሸኝቶኛል
ስመለስ ወደ ሀገሬ እየሰቀ ላግኘው

[Thinking about my separation,
My neighbors and family gathered in tears,
Crying they saw me off.
Let me find them smiling when I return to my country.]

In this song, Tibebu is praying to God for protection for his family and country. He expresses worry about how hard the separation is going to be (both for him and his family back in the home country). He wishes to find everyone in good health and smiling upon his return. As the excerpt above demonstrates, the idea of return in migration is ever present.

The all-female band Yegna²⁹ released a single entitled "ስደት ስማ በለው" (Sidet Sima Belew; Exile, Hear [He Who Has Ears]) in 2015. An excerpt of their lyrics is as follows:

የኔ ሕልሜ በሀገሬ ነው
ምን እንደሚገጥመው ያውቃል ከሀገሩ ሰው ሲወጣ ስደት
ከወገን የራቅ ከሀገሩ የወጣ ካገሩ እስኪመለስ

[My dream is in my homeland.
Who knows what happens to a person when they go abroad?
Far away from their own people until they return back to their home-
land.]

29 The girl-band which debuted in late 2013 is widely known for their hit song "Taitu" honoring the powerful Ethiopian Empress and wife of Emperor Minilik II. Yegna has also released a movie (2015) and has produced a popular sitcom (2019–present) as an offshoot of their success.

It is revealing that once again the theme of return is prevalent. The singers from Yegna are emphasizing that it is better to stay in the homeland and work hard than leave for unknown lands. Moreover, migration is equated with going into the unknown.

Yegna employ the traditional call out “Sima Belew” which roughly translates as “let him who has ears hear.” In addition to this, the band also employs traditional *shelela* or *fukkara*, which involve a particular type of posturing for emphasis. This style can be considered a sort of war cry chant generally intended as a way to boost morale, for example during warfare. It is a way to re-energize a downtrodden or defeated group by reminding them of their valor, the strength of their character, their love for country, and their storied past. This style encourages hope with the aim of bringing unity and a sense of purpose. It can also be viewed as a form of escapism and contributes to a specific and unique form of patriotism and imagined nation. While it generally tends to over-romanticize the past, it is, in essence, quintessential Ethiopian patriotism in musical form. This culturally emotive and invigorating form of music generally prompts audience participation.

We can further examine two different songs released by One House Team, a group of artists living in the US.³⁰ The songs in question are “በቃ ጥረኝ” (Beka Terign; Call Me Back, 2013), dedicated “in loving memory of all our brothers and sisters who have lost their lives in foreign countries seeking for a better life,” and “ኢትዮጵያን አደራ” (Ethiopian Adera; Take Care of Ethiopia, 2015) dedicated to “suffering Ethiopian migrants all over the world.”³¹ In both of these songs, the band highlights the perils of irregular migration, which is portrayed (correctly) as highly dangerous and potentially fatal.

“በቃ ጥረኝ” includes the following lyrics:

ማን ወዶ ይርቃል ከናቴ ካገሩ
 ባይሞላለት እንጂ ስደት መምረጡ
 ተው ስማን ከሰው አገር ስቃይ አድነን
 አንድ አድርገን ላገራችን አብቃን
 የሰው አገር የሰው መሆኑን አውቃለሁ
 በተስፋ እንጀራ እድሜዬን ገፋሁ
 ለምን ሄድሽ አትበይኝ ችግራ ብዙ ነው
 አንድም እንዲያልፈልኝ አንድም ለእናቴ ነው

30 Some of the artists in this band are also actors in the widely popular soap opera style serial *Senselet* (2017–present) that depicts the type of irregular migration they sing about in their songs.

31 As posted by Mela Productions TV on their YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@MELAMUZIQUARECORDS>, last accessed January 1, 2020.

[Who willingly travels far from his mother, his country?
 Unless something is wrong, who would choose migration?
 Please listen (God): save us from suffering in other people's countries,
 Make us one, take us back to our country.
 I know somebody else's country will always be someone else's.
 I have lived my life in unrealized hopes.
 Don't ask me why I left, my problems are many.
 For one, I want to be successful, but it is also for my mother.]

In this song, the group of artists portray migration as an involuntary, compelled decision as something born out of hardships, a forced choice.³² This song posits migration as a means for success, but sometimes migrants live with unfulfilled (and unfulfillable) dreams. On the surface, the shame around migration is generated by the fact that these migrants were forced to leave the home country; at the same time, the lack of expected success in the new country might be the source of discomfort. Once again, this is a song in which return is prayed for desired and expected. The title of the song, “በቃ ጥረኝ” (Beka Terign) translates as “Please call me back,” which is something migrants are supposedly saying to their motherland. These songs tug at the heartstrings, especially when combined with the accompanying images in the music video. In this song, the group also incorporates the *fukera* style including the lyrics “ተው በለው ይንን ሰው” (Tell him no [i.e., not to migrate]). At the same time, these artists are (comfortably) settled in their host nation (in this case, the US) which might lead the audience to question their true intentions. Although this may sound cynical, we might be able to detect a level of hypocrisy in the artists’ musical expression of longing for the home country.

The imagery used in the accompanying YouTube video clip is also worth mentioning in understanding the portrayal of migration in the Ethiopian imagination. The official music video depicts all of the following: dangerous crossings of the (Sahara) desert on foot; women deported from Saudi Arabia;³³ overfilled boats capsizing in the (supposedly Mediterranean) sea; xenophobic

32 The line of demarcation between voluntary and involuntary migration is not always clear cut. While migration generally involves the agency of the migrants, both voluntary and forced migration might be economically, socially, or politically motivated. Unfortunately, a false dichotomy prevails in the academic literature and in policy discourses to this day.

33 In 2013, Saudi Arabia expelled over a hundred thousand Ethiopians after a violent crackdown on migrant workers. See, for example, Aljazeera, “Saudis expel 100,000 Ethiopians,” December 6, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/saudis-expel-100000-illegal-ethiopians-201312591727221329.html>.

attacks on migrants in South Africa; young female migrant domestic workers abused in the Middle East and North Africa;³⁴ Ethiopian Christian martyrs on a Libyan beach;³⁵ and more. All of these images, taken directly from news coverage, are brutally graphic. This song and its video therefore emphasize that migration is a dangerous undertaking and death, violence, and physical abuse are all an ever-present risk.

There is a significant echo between the songs of One House Team, Jacky Gosee, and Abeba Desalegn. In his song “ሀቅ” (Haq; Truth, 2015), Jacky Gosee sings the following: “ወጥቼ አልተሳካ / በቤቴም ሆኔ አይሞላ / አልመቸ አለው ጎኔ” (Not successful in migration, / Going hungry while at home, / Not comfortable anywhere). In her song “ስደት” (Sidet; Exile, 2013), Abeba Desalegn sings: “ገና ጉድ ይሰማል ከአገር ከወጡ / በስደት ከመኖር . . . ያገሬ ጅብ ይብላኝ” (We hear of calamity in migration / Instead of living in exile, I would rather be eaten by my country’s hyena). All the above song lyrics are from independent artists or bands and do not form part of specific educational campaigns. Nonetheless, the next example demonstrates that there are indeed very few differences between the messaging in these two different contexts.

The UNHCR’s (United Nations Refugee Agency) “Dangerous Crossings” music campaign in 2017 was designed to serve as a warning about the dangers of crossing war-stricken Yemen through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea from Africa. The song is recorded in multiple languages, and is also available under the social media hashtag #DangerousCrossings. In the prelude to the video, there is the following caption: “A group of leading artists joined UNHCR to create a song highlighting the dangers refugees

34 The story of Shwygar Mullah, badly burned former nanny of two of Moammar Gadhafi’s grandchildren, epitomizes the abuse that Ethiopian women migrants suffer at the hands of their employers. See, for example, Dan Rivers, “Burned Gadhafi family nanny being treated in Tripoli,” August 30, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/08/30/libya.nanny.update/index.html>.

35 The beheading of thirty Ethiopian Christian migrants by the Islamic State in Libya in 2015 sent shockwaves into Ethiopia and its diaspora for its brutality. See, for example, Louisa Loveluck, “Islamic State murders 30 Ethiopian Christians in Libya,” *The Telegraph*, April 20, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocan/libya/11548360/Islamic-State-murders-30-Ethiopian-Christians-in-Libya.html>; and David D. Kirkpatrick, “ISIS Video Appears to Show Executions of Ethiopian Christians in Libya,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/20/world/middleeast/isis-video-purports-to-show-killing-of-ethiopian-christians.html>.

and migrants face crossing to and through Yemen.”³⁶ The song features artists from a number of countries singing in a number of languages, including Hany Adel (Egypt, Arabic), Aarmaanta (Somalia, Somali), Yeshe Demelash (Ethiopia, Amharic), Tadele Roba (Ethiopia, Afan Oromo), Maryam Mursal (Somalia, Somali) and Dawit Nega (Ethiopia, Tigrinya). A short excerpt from the lyrics exemplifies the song’s message: “ተጉዞ ተጉዞ አጉል ተስፋ ይዞ” (Traveling, traveling with false hope). While the artist Yeshe is singing these words, the following caption is displayed on the side “It is the longest journey and the most uncertain end.” This song, intended as an educational tool, once again highlights the perils of migrants’ journeys, particularly those that travel through a war-stricken nation such as Yemen.

Migration and Song Lyrics

The study of migration-themed Ethiopian music should go beyond the surface and explore deep-seated issues. As evidenced by the song lyrics discussed above, migration is a hotly debated topic within Ethiopian communities, both at home and abroad. Although this is one side of the story, it appears that there is a widespread negative representation of migration by various artists across a large time span (twenty years). The above overview of migration songs and the analysis of song lyrics raise a number of questions: What is the purpose or message of these migration-themed songs? Since Ethiopian migration is highly varied (in terms of means of exit, experiences, and socio-economic standing both in the home and destinations), why is there such a one-sided view of the migrant experience in this particular sample of migration-themed Ethiopian songs? Why is there such a focus on the perils of migration in Ethiopian songs? How are we to understand this predominantly negative representation of migration? Does the music about migration reflect reality on the ground? Why is there such a disconnect between this cultural message and the prevalent desire to migrate out of the country? I postulate several reasons why the prevailing migration-themed songs in this discussion provide especially negative portrayals of migration and include the recurrent theme of return. I discuss these with the caveats that a different sample of migration-themed songs from a different time period, drawing on the work of different artists located in different geographies may tell a very different narrative of the migration experience.

Nuances in the migrant experience are not evident in these song lyrics. In fact, these representations tend to flatten migrants and the migration

36 UNHCR, “Dangerous Crossings Music Video–Yemen,” accessed January 1, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNFITTB DYG0>.

experience. Ethiopian music about migration depicts an almost singular story of the victim migrant. The category of *sidet*³⁷ erases the diversity in experiences and conditions from the refugee, the expatriate, the émigré, the international student, etc. While the physical dislocation across these categories may be similar, political and sociocultural experiences and/or conditions vary greatly. The song lyrics primarily reference irregular or undocumented migrants who most often end up in low-skilled and low-paid work. Absent from this narrative are educated (i.e., privileged) migrants like most of the authors in this volume. Although most migration can include traumatic experiences to a certain extent, it is not clear whether this represents the totality of Ethiopian migrant experiences. It appears that, through the power of nostalgia, migrants engage in some form of retrospective idealization of the homeland.³⁸

The exile, condemned to be on the outside,³⁹ a victim of circumstances,⁴⁰ is a powerful image. The exile's state of belonging is forever questioned. It is within this context that artists often write and perform their songs. It is within this context that Ethiopian music portrays the migrant as a victim and strips away all agency. Unfortunately, in these songs, the agency and self-determination of the migrants seem to be stripped away. These songs do not tell a multifaceted story. They render invisible other types of migrant stories, outside of irregular migration and portraying the migrant as a victim. Once again, these representations of migrants tend to flatten migrants and the migration experience.

Context

Music, like other cultural productions, is contextual. The context of when these songs were written and released helps us to understand representations and sentiments around migration, particularly highlighting the uncertainty salient in migration. A number of these songs were released on the

37 There is a larger (linguistic) problem within Ethiopian configurations of migration as *sidet*. *Sidet* is a loaded term that is more directly translated as “exile” (indicating political and social expulsion) rather than “migration” (which is a more neutral and more encompassing term). Although there is a more benign and encompassing term for migration in Amharic, *filset*, this term is rarely used, highlighting the negative perception that Ethiopians have of the act of migration. Nonetheless, *sidet* is the more widely used term, sometimes viewed as benign migration, devoid of the associations of the English word “exile.”

38 Goitom, “The Epistemological Significance of Tizita.”

39 See Lagos-Pope, *Exile in Literature*.

40 See Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*.

occasion of the Ethiopian millennium where cries of unity and national pride echoed loudly. Another significant time period for the release of these songs is 2015 when thirty Ethiopian martyrs were massacred mercilessly in Libya while migrating to reach the greener pastures of Europe. Around the same time, rampant stories of abuse in the Middle East dominated the headlines in Ethiopia and the diaspora. This context led to a fraught relationship with migrants and inevitably to the narrative of the migrant as a victim. These varying contexts hold the key to understanding the lamentations and negative perceptions of migration in the lyrics discussed above. This context of perilous migration also explains the educational slant of these song lyrics.

The desire to migrate within Ethiopian society has been widely written about, as migration is posited as a solution to both real and imagined problems. Therefore, in a country where so many aspire to be migrants, artists are perhaps trying to counter this tidal wave, trying to dissuade people from leaving. More specifically, the artists might be against irregular (and therefore dangerous) migration, rather than being against all forms of migration. Moreover, the circumstances of irregular migration also likely have a profound effect. Some of the dangerous routes that young Ethiopian migrants have taken have led to physical and psychological abuses, not to mention the scores of deaths reported on a yearly basis. Some of these songs are intended to directly or indirectly educate the public about the perils of migration. In a sense, these songs are potentially meant to counteract the growing desire to migrate from Ethiopian youth. The education intent is obvious when considering the song sponsored by the UNHCR. However, even when artists have more agency in writing and performing songs outside of an overt educational campaign, the educational intent does not seem to disappear. In sum, perilous migration has seeped into and captured the Ethiopian imagination, and therefore, artists are trying to dissuade further irregular migration through dangerous routes.

Artists' Identity and Positioning

At the heart of this contradiction is perhaps the role that artists have carved out for themselves. Artists' personal circumstances affect the types of songs released in particular time periods. For instance, for artists such as Tigist Shibabaw and One House Team, being based in a foreign location can influence their perception of migration. As a result, their songs can express their ambivalence towards the disjunction between migrating, staying, returning, and other forms of im/mobility. The identity and positioning of the artists also needs to be questioned when analyzing these migration-themed song lyrics. These songs enable the artists to insert themselves into the debate of

migration and its place in the national narrative. We therefore also have to investigate the artists' possible motivations in penning such lyrics and releasing such songs for wider audience consumption. While the commodification of music as an art form is beyond the scope of this article, music is a socio-cultural domain enmeshed in capitalist negotiations. Protest songs can thus be coopted for profit. Yet, even outside of this market perspective, artists are providing a social commentary and thus claiming a stake in local and diasporic discourses on migration.

It is worth keeping in mind that some of these artists are currently living in the diaspora, away from their homeland. Perhaps they are also trying to portray themselves as not really disconnected, but rather having a foot in two different societies or yearning to return to their home country. This outlook is therefore useful if we want to reconsider the song lyrics and the artists' perceptions of migration through the lens of ambivalence. It is possible to think about these songs as a sort of apology or proof that they have not "sold out" or a way to assuage their own guilt. These songs celebrate the homeland and denigrate migration. The haunted migrant artist is therefore demonstrating that their allegiance is still (primarily) with the home country.

Second, it appears that there is an ingrained guilt associated with migration in Ethiopian culture. For most of the country's modern history, migration has predominantly been perceived as something utterly negative, exile and banishment from the homeland. Stories abound about Ethiopian dignitaries begging the various Kings and Queens, notably Emperor Haile Selassie, not to banish them from their homeland when they were designated as ambassadors to foreign lands. Although the sociopolitical and economic circumstances of the country have changed drastically in the past fifty to a hundred years, the prevailing Ethiopian narrative about migration has not drastically changed. While migration and therefore resulting cultural perceptions and interpretations evolve over time and changing circumstances, migration in the above song lyrics is predominantly portrayed as betrayal of the motherland. We can even talk about a sort of double consciousness when contemplating an Ethiopian cultural understanding of migration. Migration is both a desirable and lamentable condition. It is both something to aspire to and look down upon.

Political Criticism in the Tradition of *Sem ena Werg*

The lyrics to the song "ኢትዮጵያን አደራ" (Ethiopian Adera; Take Care of my Ethiopia, 2015) by One House Team include the poignant question: "ታዲያ ማንው ተጠያቂ ለወገኔ ስደት?" (So, who is responsible for my country folks'

migration?). This question brings us to the most important lens through which we can understand Ethiopian migration-themed songs. The political messaging in migration-themed song lyrics is only thinly veiled. Music can carry both open and hidden transcripts, especially in Amharic where double entendre in the form of *Qene* is common practice.⁴¹ Within the tradition of *Qene* or *Sem-ena-worq* (wax and gold), Amharic language users have a way of hiding meaning in plain sight, and the listener has to contextually uncover multiple meanings. As I have stated elsewhere, “the dualism that prevails in the Wax and Gold literary tradition of *Qene* is also prevalent in Ethiopia’s perceptions and practice of migration.”⁴²

We can therefore analyze migration-themed songs as coded messages in which artists directly lament the fates of migrants but indirectly criticize the state that created the conditions that are compelling scores of Ethiopians to look for greener pastures elsewhere.⁴³ In essence, these songs become a veiled political criticism highlighting the tendency of the population to “vote with their feet.” This layered meaning and un/intentional political commentary therefore provide another layer to understanding migration-themed song lyrics. By focusing on malignant migration, artists are pointing fingers, accusing society at home, and particularly its economic and political structures, of being lamentable. Songs about migration can become tools to circumvent official censorship. Criticism of migration is simultaneously criticism of the government, especially in a political environment of repression of speech.

Migration is posited as a precarious undertaking and the attitude expressed towards this phenomenon is one of dissonance and ambivalence. On one hand, migration is seen as an increasingly viable alternative for survival and advancement, particularly for young people. Migration thus provides an escape valve with unmatched opportunities for economic independence and socio-political advancement despite the challenges of the home country. On the other hand, the out-migration from Ethiopia therefore testifies to the systematic problems that plague the country, particularly the youths. The migration journey itself, particularly for irregular migrants, is fraught with dangers. Moreover, conditions in the host countries are also problematic, again particularly for undocumented migrants.

In a number of songs, we see that migration is positioned as a socio-economic and political threat to the motherland, Ethiopia. These songs reveal an ingrained bias and long-lasting theoretical (if not practical) aversion to

41 M. Girma, M. “Whose meaning?”

42 H. Girma, H. “Language, Culture and Hierarchies of Migration,” 94.

43 See Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

the classification as a migrant. Poverty and political expulsion are not the sole cause of Ethiopian migration. Moreover, migration is an undeniable part of Ethiopian social reality. Migration can be a steppingstone for personal and communal socio-economic betterment, yet one of the reigning threads in migration-themed Amharic songs is migration as a lamentable failure. Although failure is a common theme, we have to ask: whose failure? Does this represent failure on the part of the individual migrants who are perhaps conditioned to look to the outside for greener pastures? Or, more importantly, is it a failure on the part of the home society, particularly the political and economic structures, that has led to such massive out-migration?

Audience

Lastly, it is important to consider potential audiences of these songs in the diaspora. Since music is not geographically limited, these songs are addressed to wider Ethiopian society, both in the homeland and in the diaspora. Since music is not like ordinary discourse, it can engender a potent emotional connection that other mediums are perhaps unable to carry. Music is extremely emotive and bound to individuals' identities; it can therefore evoke a wide range of emotions in the listener and have a number of therapeutic benefits. The migration-themed songs discussed in this chapter are generally sorrowful, portraying longing and questioning belonging. The ethnomusicological literature has amply shown that music can be an effective tool to develop and represent identities, inciting, motivating, and rebuking as needed. When members of the Ethiopian diaspora hear these songs (while perhaps encountering hostility in their destination countries), it strengthens their connection to the homeland and asserts that they have a home where their belonging will not be questioned. At the same time, within the context of globalization, the ideas of a homeland and of belonging to a diaspora are not always clear cut.

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Chapter 13

Between Worlds

Ethiopian Adoptee Identity

Kassaye Berhanu-Mac Donald

I was born somewhere in northern Ethiopia towards the end of 1985 and adopted via private adoption to Canada in 1987. I do not have any reliable information about my background as there is no paper trail. The lack of information and my inability to get answers started to torment me in my adult years. Reflecting on the injustices in adoption through reading critical perspectives such as Trenka, Oparah, and Shin's 2006 books *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* catapulted me into the world of adoptee advocacy. I was eager to connect with adoptees sharing critical perspectives on adoption by weaving the personal with the political and I felt a deep sense of liberation and belonging which I had never experienced before.

As I became active in adoptee circles, I noticed the lack of Ethiopian adoptees there.¹ After a series of adoptee suicides, including of Fisseha Sol Samuel,² fellow adoptee advocate Aselefech Evans and I created a closed Facebook group for Ethiopian adoptees. We wanted to understand the low level of visibility of Ethiopian adoptees and felt it was imperative to break the isolation experienced by many adoptees by creating a safe space where they could connect with other adoptees and feel a sense of community.

1 This could have been due to age: the bulk of Ethiopian-American adoptees were adopted in the 2000s; they were still teenagers or young adults at the time of creation of the group.

2 Ethiopian adoptee and son of award-winning author Melissa Fay Greene, who writes about this death here: <https://www.thecut.com/2018/06/a-mother-considers-her-sons-final-thoughts.html>.

Admittedly, I had unrealistic expectations about the group; I imagined compelling discussions and a slew of exciting project ideas, however, there was not much engagement at first. Nonetheless, adoptees messaged us privately telling us how happy they were to have a space for Ethiopian adoptees.³

I continued my quest for more Ethiopian adoptee engagement and discovered public French Ethiopian adoptee groups where many discussions were happening about returning to Ethiopia for travel and to find family. I quickly started chatting with dozens of adoptees for months, sometimes lasting into the early hours of the morning. I was ecstatic about their openness to discuss their experiences and to know more about adoption from France and French perceptions of adoption.

This essay draws on a combination of discussions with adoptees (particularly Ethiopian French adoptees), personal experiences, and academic research. Research on international adoption tends to focus on adoptees' ability to adapt to their adoptive families and their new environment. This research is usually conducted by non-adoptee academics who tend to be adoptive parents or former adoption professionals. In addition, their research focuses on adoptees in specific locations such as Sweden or in the United States, whereas I am drawing on experiences of adoptees living all over the diaspora. Moreover, my status as an adoptee and my critical perspective on adoption makes me privy to difficult conversations that are not easily accessible due to stigma, taboos, and judgment on sharing one's views on adoption. Furthermore, I am tying in the experiences of Ethiopian parents (also known as birth or biological parents) to get a more holistic view of adoption.

This chapter is structured as follows. Part one traces a brief history of international adoption from Ethiopia, before part two discusses the impacts of international adoption on Ethiopian families. Current research does not take Ethiopian families' experiences of lifelong loss and bereavement into account, nor does it adequately study the impacts and outcomes of reunion on adoptees and their families. By omitting these experiences, it is impossible to fully understand the reasons for adoption or the long-term effects of adoption. The third section discusses identity and race, with a focus on the importance of adoptee communities and mental health, followed by the last section on gratefulness.

A Brief History of Ethiopian Adoption

International adoption (also known as intercountry adoption or ICA) as we know it today began after the Korean War in the 1950s. ICA was viewed as a

3 There has been more engagement in the group in the last few years.

moral and humanitarian response while simultaneously fulfilling a desire for children. This ethos continues to exist, however this line of reasoning omits the political nature of adoption where children become vulnerable to adoption due to difficult socioeconomic circumstances as a result of war, political or economic instability, or natural disaster. While there is robust evidence documenting corruption amongst adoption agencies, orphanages, and civil servants alike, the demand for adoptable children from Western families supersedes the will to fix systems that are unable to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. Consequently, the beneficiaries of adoption benefit and inadvertently undermine in-country infrastructure such as orphanages and charities, providing assistance to children and families.

Africans have always had ways to deal with orphans before ICA existed: “Communities would care for children whose parents had passed away; either family members, relatives, neighbors, or members of their ethnic group would readily adopt the children” (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 120; Breuning and Ishiyama 2009, 90). In Ethiopia, “orphanhood, both biological and social, is a significant structural feature of Ethiopian society, one of the oldest cultures in the world” (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 120). Beckstrom contends that the Oromo have practiced full-assimilation adoption, termed *gudifecha*, since the 1800s (Beckstrom 1972, 147). Similarly, the Amhara adopted the practice, but called it *yemarlilij* (honey child) and *yetutlij* (breast child) (Beckstrom 1972, 147). These customary adoption practices were carried out in ceremony, encompassing rituals, symbols, feasts, and oath-taking (Beckstrom 1972, 147). In addition, “the consent of natural parents or relatives is solicited and received as part of the ceremony” (Beckstrom 1972, 147). The extent of how often customary adoption was practiced is difficult to ascertain, however since community care was the most common solution to adoption, it was likely not a typical practice and only one of last resort (Gebeyehu 2008).

Widespread international adoption from Ethiopia started with Sweden⁴ (Beckstrom 1972) in 1969 (Gebeyehu 2008). But ICA became a fairly common practice in the 1970s, as drought, famine, and civil war resulted in thousands of children being separated from their parents (Deguchi 2013, 428). Furthermore, illness and diseases such as HIV/AIDS contributed to children becoming “orphans” and thus being sent to Western countries (Gebeyehu 2008; Graff 2014; Breuning and Ishiyama 2009). Urban migration only fomented extreme poverty, leading to more children being relinquished by their parents (Beckstrom 1972).

4 Bekstrom cites infertility in Sweden as the main reason for this wave of adoption.

In the 2000s, adoption from Ethiopia flourished for a few reasons: children were young and healthy and it was cheaper and faster than adoption from other countries (Gebeyehu 2008; Rotabi 2010). While evangelical Christians are at the forefront of “orphan” rescue movements, it is worth noting that “saving the orphans” is often used to mask the would-be adopter’s own infertility or other medical issues (Perry 2017). Some adoptive parents have also shared with me that it is easier to adopt from further away because there is less threat of the family of origin in interfering with their lives (cf. Yngvesson 2010), including trying take back their child back. Moreover, the United Nations definition of orphan is very broad as it relates to children with no parentage or one living parent (MacDonald 2014).

Ethiopia did not ratify the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, which sets the standards and regulations for international adoption practices (for instance, private adoptions are prohibited) (Gebeyehu 2008, 13). As a result, adoption agencies can operate without accreditation or without oversight by a governing body. For example, in 2008 when Guatemala banned international adoption, adoption agencies accused of human trafficking and child smuggling merely transferred their businesses to Ethiopia (Graff 2010; Rotabi 2010, 3). Statistics show that the number of adoptions from Ethiopia increased following Guatemala’s ban on adoption (Graff 2014; Rotabi 2010, 3).

Between 2005 and 2009, Ethiopian adoptions tripled from 1,713 to 4,676 (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 123). According to a 2008 national study on Ethiopian orphanages, 6,500 children were in orphanages, not including unregulated orphanages and stash houses. In 2009, approximately 4,500 children were adopted from orphanages run by adoption agencies (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 121, 123; Graff 2014).

Prior to the 2000s, there were three government-run orphanages in Ethiopia, but by the early 2000s, privately run orphanages increased from 87 to 107 within two years (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 122; Graff 2014). The Ethiopian government cracked down on orphanages, closing almost half of them and finding that most were funded exclusively by adoption agencies (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 124). Ethiopia clamped down on adoptions between 2011 and 2013, eventually banning international adoption in 2018 citing the improper treatment of Ethiopian children as the reason (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018). Adoption demands shifted to Uganda, the next available option, where the number of orphanages and children in care skyrocketed (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018, 125). As such, inter-country adoption is dependent on the host country’s structural ability to supply healthy children as opposed to a preference for culture, customs, or race.

Breuning and Ishiyama attribute less restrictive adoption laws in African countries to their degree of globalization where “leaders may trust their ability to navigate relationships in international adoption or their willingness to commodify orphaned children; either to lessen the economic burden for caring for these children or to profit from these children” (2009, 98). This could be true since the US is one of the major recipients of Ethiopian children and has been a close ally of Ethiopia since the 1990s. Furthermore, American adoptive parents are large funders of charities, mainly focused on education and women’s empowerment (Breuning and Ishiyama 2009, 97). They also send remittances to their adopted children’s families and travel frequently to Ethiopia, thus increasing tourism in Ethiopia.⁵

Between Belief and Desperation: The Plight of Ethiopian Parents

Studies conducted on birth parents (referred to herein as Ethiopian parents or families of adoption loss)⁶ repeatedly show that children were relinquished out of desperation and in hope of a better future in the West (Aleign 2011; Demissie 2013; Hailu 2017).

In Demissie’s case studies (2013), all the mothers interviewed lacked financial resources and family support and had very low education levels. Placing their children, even temporarily, in an orphanage was seen as the best solution. In some cases, family members placed the children without their consent. As Hailu and others have pointed out, the prospect of adoption seemed attractive to Ethiopian parents and other family members as they were told their children would be well taken care of and given a good education abroad and given updates and visits home (Aleign 2011; Demissie 2013; Hailu 2017). They were not told the truth—i.e., that adoption meant severing familial ties and they would not get to see their children again (Aleign 2011; Demissie 2013).

5 These are my own observations based on being a member of numerous closed Facebook groups for US-based adoptive parents with over three thousand members.

6 Here, I use the terms “Ethiopian family,” “family” or “families of adoption loss” interchangeably as opposed to “birth parents” or “birth family.” It is a more respectful respective term to parents who have lost their children to adoption, as it takes into account their pain (or shame) and also acknowledges that they are still mothers or fathers beyond birth, even if they did not have the possibility of parenting. It is worth noting here that there appear to be very few, if any studies carried out on birth families (families of adoption loss) by non-Ethiopian, Western scholars.

Still, inherent in this thinking is the prevailing perception of the American Dream (or in this case, the Western Dream) whereby adoption is better for the children because they will be better off economically (Bunkers, Bradford, and Rotabi 2018; Hailu 2017). Connected to this is the predator–prey relationship between the adoption industry and Ethiopian parents, where parents are bullied into giving their children up (also known as child harvesting) by brokers and middlemen (Graff 2014; Hailu 2017, 214). In addition, child theft, staged abandonments, bribes, and falsifying testimonials in court has been commonplace, often involving police officers and civil servants (Hailu 2017, 208). Graff’s chilling article in the *Pacific Standard* (2014), for instance, showed how the US embassy staff were privy to the child sales but unable to take action due to the lack of legal means to do so.

Procurement of Children

While most orphanages are located in Addis Ababa, children appear to be transferred there from other locations. For example, if a large quantity of children come from a particular region, this is usually due to either political conflict, environmental issues, or a combination of both. During the 1980s, there was an influx of children transferred from the northern regions to the capital due the famine and conflict. In the 2000s, however, over half of the children adopted came from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Regions (SNNPR) (Graff 2014). It is difficult to find exact statistics because family members sometimes travel to Addis Ababa to give up their children, mainly because there is a higher chance of being taken by an orphanage and getting adopted in the capital (Alelign 2011; Beckstrom 1972).

While adoptions spiked after famed Hollywood actors Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt adopted their daughter Zahara in 2006, followed by the eventual ban in 2018, there continues to be relative silence about the plight of Ethiopian families, particularly of mothers. Based on the little research available, mothers who have given up their children have demonstrated high rates of depression, usually untreated, suicidal thoughts, and infertility (Alelign 2011; Nielsen 2017). This is only compounded by the intense shame and regret (Demissie 2013; Kalkidan 2001). To my knowledge, Beteseb Felega (also known as Ethiopian Adoption Connection)⁷ is the only organization at the forefront of advocating for Ethiopian families of adoption loss and

7 Beteseb Felega/Ethiopian Adoption Connection was founded by an American adoptive parent. It was born out of the founder’s struggle in searching for her adopted Ethiopian children’s parents.

helping them reconnect with their lost children. They offer free listings (for parents and adoptees) in a public database and provide invaluable services for reunited families, as well as acting as a go-between for Ethiopian families, adoptive families, and adoptees.

Surely a more complete picture of international adoption could be drawn and understood when the voices of adult adoptees and Ethiopian family members are included, besides more safeguards to protect vulnerable families and children (Aleign 2011).

Adoptee Community, Racism, and Mental Health

Mental Health

Most adoptees have not received adequate psychosocial support to deal with the impacts of adoption. Indeed, there has been (and continues to be) a lack of post-adoption services for adopted children and adults by qualified professionals, knowledgeable about adoption from a critical, adoptee-perspective.⁸ An article in the journal *Pediatrics* in 2013, for instance, reported that adoptees are four times more likely than the average non-adoptee to commit suicide (Keyes et al. 2013). Adoptees also have higher rates of psychiatric illnesses, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal activity compared to non-adoptees (Gebeyehu 2008, 12; Hjern et al. 2002; Keyes et al. 2013).

The idea that adoption is a traumatic event for adoptees is discussed elsewhere, however for the purpose of this chapter, I prefer to focus on the importance of community for adoptees while acknowledging that most adoptees experience adoption trauma or other issues stemming from family separation. Indeed, there is an inherent loss in adoption that adoptees experience differently. What seems to make a difference, however, is the level of openness to discussing adoption and being understood. Based on my observations, the level of openness about adoption is influenced by culture and ideas about family. For instance, adoptee activism is very strong in places like the US, where domestic adoptees have been successful at accessing their original birth certificates, or in Australia, where there has been a national apology. In the English-speaking world, it is normalized for adoptees to have their own virtual spaces or associations and be a critical voice. This is further exemplified by the wealth of English-language books and a burgeoning list

8 Most mental health professionals are not adoptee-centred or critical in their perspective on adoption. I know this from personal experience and from speaking with numerous other adoptees.

of non-fiction novels by adoptees.⁹ This appears to differentiate significantly from my experience with international adoptees from France, where there is a strong pressure to assimilate and integrate. Adoptee spaces are more acceptable when they include anyone connected to adoption (adoptees, adoptive parents, adoption professionals, etc.).

Race and Identity: Why Community Matters

The importance for adoptees of color in having community is of utmost importance. Internationally adopted people are generally adopted by white families and more likely to be living in racial isolation. According to McKee, since most adoptees are separated by space, having an online adoptee community “provides a venue for incorporating ‘lost’ voices within ethnic communities,” resulting in “de-territorialized” relationships (2016, 1). This becomes especially important for navigating daily micro-aggressions experienced by Black adoptees due to anti-Black racism in society writ large, but also more intimately within their adoptive family and peer groups (Baden 2016; Gebeyehu 2008).

While adoptees identify with the culture of their upbringing, they often experience exclusion at the societal level, because being Black and immigrants makes them vulnerable to being treated unfairly or with disdain (Gebeyehu 2008, 6). I have written elsewhere that adoptees are visible yet invisible immigrants who have a vastly different immigrant experience (Mac Donald 2018). There is, however, sometimes a difference between how adoptees self-identify and how others perceive them (Gebeyehu 2008, 11). In my personal experience, I saw myself as Black, but I did not readily identify myself as Ethiopian until I moved to an urban environment where people started asking me questions about where I come from and, specifically, about Ethiopia. It was the embarrassment of not having answers that pushed me to dig into my roots, rather than curiosity. I had an interest in connecting to my origins, but up to that point I did not know how to do so because I had no contact with Ethiopians and felt entirely removed from the country and its culture.¹⁰ Although I never felt like an English-speaking Quebecer, that was my cultural upbringing; entirely white, rural, and English-speaking in southern Quebec. After moving to the city, no longer protected by my family’s and friends’ whiteness,¹¹ I experienced more overt racism, racial profiling, and frequent micro-aggressions where assumptions

9 Adoptee reading website: <http://adopteereading.com/>.

10 I met Ethiopians for the first time aged twenty-four in Montreal.

11 I did not experience this growing up because I grew up in a small community; everyone knew my family and who I was.

were made about me not knowing certain things because I was not “from here.”

Ethiopian Swedish adoptees (adopted in the 1960s and 1970s), had similar experiences of being raised in completely homogeneously white communities, usually in the countryside with an intense pressure to be and look Swedish (Gebeyehu 2008). In Grönlund’s study, adoptees felt a sense of attachment to Ethiopia through cultural elements (e.g., music, food), community or the land itself, but most firmly identified as Swedish (2010, 190).¹² Adoptees often feel a sense of being between two worlds and lacking a sense of real belonging (Gebeyehu 2008, 33).

Similar to other diaspora communities, the loss of culture and language through immigration and assimilation processes aimed at becoming Western and fitting into the dominant culture are similar, but the cut is deeper for adoptees because the assimilation process comes from a more intimate place: family. Some French adoptees shared with me that speaking Amharic was banned at home in the hope that they would speak French well and assimilate faster into French culture.¹³ Some were adopted with siblings or kept in touch with fellow adoptees from the same orphanages.

Because of the distance and separation from Ethiopian communities and lack of connection to their Ethiopian families of origin, adoptees sometimes lack the sense of safety and shared understanding that they need to negotiate otherwise hostile external environments. Alongside engendering their *othered* identity, the insider-outsider position that adoptees occupy contributes to them feeling more comfortable in diverse environments and living abroad (Gebeyehu 2008; Grönlund 2010).

Interestingly, this has not stopped them from connecting with Ethiopia as adults (and Ethiopian culture and communities), through travel,¹⁴ work, and school projects,¹⁵ building friendships with other adoptees, re-connecting with their families and in some cases, re-learning Amharic and starting families with Ethiopian partners.

12 Celebrity chef and Ethiopian Swedish adoptee Marcus Samuelsson is an example of this.

13 I was told that this was commonplace in the 1990s.

14 I have heard a few stories of adoptees travelling to Ethiopia without notifying their adoptive families once they turned eighteen (of legal age) to find their Ethiopian family or to discover the country by themselves.

15 I have met many adoptees who return to volunteer in orphanages, for university placements or work-related projects.

Finding Family, Searching for Truth

Not all adoptees are interested in searching for or reuniting with their families, however interest and curiosity in knowing their roots usually emerges during or at defining movements in their lives (death, end of a relationship, or birth of a child). It is worth noting that adoptees are often discouraged from searching for family members due to missing information on their adoption papers and stories about their relinquishment.¹⁶

As I have gleaned through discussions with numerous adult adoptees from France, the US, Sweden, and the Netherlands, most were given the same information about their background: anonymously abandoned or deceased parents, with names usually missing or incomplete. After further investigation through an adoption agency or hiring a private investigator, some located their families. For example, French adoptees contacted their adoption agency, who would contact the manager of the orphanage, who would then get in touch with the families.¹⁷ Other adoptees found their families on social media or their families would find them, sometimes with the help of family friends living in the same country as the adoptee.

Some adult adoptees have taken the initiative to search for the families themselves, assisted or paid for by their adoptive parents. In addition, Beteseb Felega/Ethiopian Adoption Connection, founded and run by a white adoptive parent from the US, has been instrumental in helping adoptees connect with their families. Since its inception, the organization has helped reunite over 150 families through their online database and spreading the word through Facebook. Still, many adoptees are missing crucial information to even carry out a search.

While reunion is glorified as an adventure in popular films, it is often a heart-wrenching, painful, and complicated experience to navigate given cultural, linguistic, and geographical barriers. Many adoptees build up their reunion in their head for years (starting as children); they imagine and fantasize about what their family is like, leading to them having expectations when the reunion finally takes place. Those adopted at an older age sometimes already have an idea or recollection of their families and their former lives in Ethiopia.

As mentioned above, parents of adoption loss often feel immense shame for having given up their children and are sometimes unwilling to talk about

16 They are told that they are orphans and that their adoptive family is their *only* family. Their adoption papers reflect this truth, as first and last name (or both) are usually missing or have been changed.

17 Every week, there are several posts in which adoptees enquire about “how to find their biological parents” on the public French Facebook group.

the relinquishment. This makes it hard for adoptees to get specific answers from their families and to know their story: ultimately, reunion does not necessarily bring the closure expected by adoptees, which sometimes causes rifts between them and their families. Another area yet to be explored by research is the impact of adoption and reunion on siblings left behind¹⁸ and how this affects sibling relationships and their overall health and wellness.

Adoptee's Burden: A Note on Gratefulness

When asked about their personal experiences with adoption, many adoptees report feeling grateful for being adopted. While this could be true, feelings of gratefulness often mask other not-so-happy feelings. For all intents and purposes, gratefulness is the narrative that adoptees are intended to follow are coached in, and taught to promulgate from their first arrival in their adoptive home. In my many conversations with “grateful” adoptees, many have expressed very painful experiences that paint a different picture than the otherwise “happy” adoption experience they choose to portray. Performing gratefulness is a survival mechanism to fit in with adoptive families, peers, and society's views of adoption, to be loved, and, most importantly, to not be abandoned once again. To understand this, it is crucial to understand that many adoptees often *feel* on some level that love is conditional—even though it may not be. No matter if adoptees have an amazing and support adoptive family, it does not remove the fact that they were relinquished, and having biological ties severed is traumatic. It is popular to intellectually downplay this loss and wounding, but the pain or “primal wound”¹⁹ of being abandoned (no matter the reason) by one's mother can run deep.

Adoptees who speak up or are critical of adoption are recipients of personal attacks and usually seen as just being sour because they had negative experiences of adoption or were “unsuccessful” adoptees. In truth, however, this strategy seeks to discredit their perspectives, specifically because they shatter or at least threaten potential adoptive parents' ideals of family formation and, in turn, of the happiness that everyone is entitled to by having children. Furthermore, it calls into question the power and privilege of adoptive parents in the adoption triad;²⁰ adoptive parents only gain from adoption: they have absolutely no losses. Meanwhile, first families and adoptees

18 The theme of siblinghood is explored in Katrine W. Kjaer's documentary “Girl in Return: A Teenager's Journey Back to Ethiopia” (2019).

19 *Primal Wound* (1993) by Nancy Verrier is a book close to the hearts of many adoptees.

20 Adoption triad refers to adoptee, adoptive parent, and parents.

experience losses and maybe some gains, depending on the person but there is never a full gain.

Adoptive parents have historically been resistant to accept their privilege in the equation, which extends to the fact that adoptive parents are usually white, middle-class or upper middle-class, and tend to be highly educated. They also continue to have immense control over the adoption narrative—i.e., what stories are told and what messages are disseminated through media, books, research, and policy—because they hold positions of power in the media, government, universities, corporations, and charitable foundations. The combination of power and race speaks to the white savior complex prevalent in adoption, where adoptees are seen as helpless children in need of being rescued from misery by white benevolent saviors. Inextricably tied to this is a possessiveness that sometimes exists (that goes beyond jealousy), where the ultimate goal (or result) is to make adoptees feel indebted to them for having given them a “better” life.

Because of the unequal power distribution in adoption (in structure and narrative), adoptees feel silenced, but they also do not readily have access to alternate perspectives. Most books and formal research are not necessarily critical of adoption; this is, however, changing. Intercountry adoptees are finding space (and being heard), in large part due to the pioneering work of adoptee activists and scholars, who have paved the way for younger adoptees.

Arguably, adoptees’ level of gratefulness also correlates with their adoptive families’ social class. People who adopt internationally tend to be middle class or above. Some of the adoptees I have conversed with have had very (economically) privileged lives: private schools, university paid, trips abroad (including back to Ethiopia), and everything in between. They would not have these opportunities had they been adopted by lower-class families or not been adopted at all.

Recognizing the privilege in adoption and also being critical of a system that inadvertently de-possesses families of the most precious thing—their children—is not something every adoptee can or feels compelled to reconcile with.

In addition, adoptees are faced with an internal dilemma in terms of loyalty—there is a pressure to be and appear loyal. Most importantly, disloyalty can have real consequences on adoptees’ level of safety as well as their material and emotional well-being, namely being re-homed (if a minor) or being cut-off financially or emotionally. It must be noted that adoptees who are more outspoken are usually those who do not have much to lose (financially or otherwise), which is a form of privilege in and of itself.

Conclusion

While ICA from Ethiopia has been commonplace since the 1970s, until being banned in 2018 by the Ethiopian government, there are over thirty-two thousand Ethiopian adoptees worldwide in Europe, North America, and Australia (Selman, n.d). Many of these adoptees have had ties to their family, culture, language, and customs severed through adoption, but some have shown an interest in reconnecting with what was lost, sometimes supported in doing so by their adoptive families. Still, the challenges of being Black, adopted transracially, and isolated from adoptee communities or Ethiopians, coupled with family and societal views hostile to alternative or critical perspectives on adoption, causes adoptees to carry a huge burden—all in the name of gratefulness. In addition, post-adoption services are few and far between, therefore adoptees do not have a chance to unpack how their adoption affects their lives from a young age to adulthood, with an adoptee-competent therapist. All these factors only foment the enormous impacts on adoptees' mental health and well-being.

For adoptees, search and reunion can be painful. But it can also be life-altering to know the real story behind why they were given up; that they were not necessarily unwanted, but rather their families lacked adequate resources to take care of them. Reunion can give adoptees a sense of peace; however, it can also bring disappointment. In addition, it does not change their reality of living between cultures and worlds and not always feeling a deep sense of belonging. For these reasons, building community support networks with fellow adoptees and strengthening ties to the larger Ethiopian diaspora (as well as Black communities and other communities of color) are important for bringing about positive change in the lives of Ethiopian adoptees.

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Conclusion

Three concepts organize the preceding papers that make up *The Global Ethiopian Diaspora*: migrations, connections, and belongings. This book, through its thirteen substantive chapters organized into three sections, offers a critical interrogation of each of these analytical frameworks. Although the issues covered here represent different thematic and theoretical orientations, not to mention their varied temporal and spatial foci, they are all woven together in a web of relationships to tell a complicated story of a modern human condition. This is a condition in which Ethiopians coming from all walks of life are engaged in a global process of mobility that unsettles existing assumptions about what is to be a migrant and a diaspora. Existing notions of culture, belonging, politics, identity, citizenship, and economy are not only destabilized but also rearticulated to capture the complexity, multiplicity, and fungibility of social reality. As such, the thirteen chapters inform and enrich each other, weaving a richly nuanced and deeply dynamic analysis of the multifaceted and plural experiences of Ethiopian migrants globally. The story is therefore a collection of multiple, intensely interconnected stories.

Amsale Alemu's "Exhuming the Narrative: Imagining Prince Alemayehu in the Ethiopian Diaspora" tells the fascinating yet heart-wrenching story of a mid-nineteenth-century Ethiopian prince, whose death at the age of eighteen could be said to have begun a painful but enriching conversation about exile, displacement, adoption, and historical restitution. His short life and the narratives around it, both hegemonic and subaltern, have engendered a perspective or perspectives to interrogate notions of belonging, agency, or lack thereof, and liminality. His past and his complicated experience spanning three worlds generated a narrative that many of his fellow modern Ethiopians summon to articulate their encounter with migration, exile, displacement, and adjustment. Alemu's chapter ties seamlessly with those that grapple with themes she raises, including adoption, repatriation, bifocality, and liminality. The final chapter in this collection, Kassaye Berhanu-Mac Donald's "Between Worlds: Ethiopian Adoptee Identity," is a discussion, or rather a personal account, of suspended belongings and the in-betweenness that many migrants and members of diasporic communities must negotiate. As an adoptee herself, the author tells an inside story of dislocation through adoption at an early age but also because of her "exilic" existence for lack of a sense of rootedness. Unlike Prince Alemayehu, the

subject of Alemu's chapter, Berhanu-Mac Donald was able to forge a community of adoptees and an identity that is firmly transnational using discourse but also everyday practice (of facing racism, dealing with mental health, and searching for roots).

Reading Alpha Abebe's "Young Diasporans of Ethiopian Origin: A Historically Grounded Generation" alongside Shimelis Bonsa Gulema's "Interrogating Ethiopia: Diaspora, Social Media, and Partisan Discourses" and Nassisse Solomon's "From 'Lega Harar' to Adowa to Haile Selassie: The Evocation of Popular and Contested Symbols of Ethiopian Topography, Culture, and History in Self-Representations of Ethiopia and Ethiopians in Canada," one is offered with a critical exploration of the dynamic, multiple, and oppositional ways in which the nation is (re)imagined, identities are (re) defined, and connections with homeland and hostland are made, remade, and unmade. Discourse and practice as well as agency and structure interweave in complex ways to generate deep entanglements and ambivalent relationships between migrants and diasporas on the one hand and their countries of origin on the other. Abebe underscores the inherent complexity and fluidity of these transnational relationships both in the deeply personal and quotidian lives of diasporas and in their political engagements with state and society. She acknowledges how pre- and post-migration experiences, especially migration because of violence and political persecution, shape the way people organize their personal and political lives, de/construct their identities, and articulate how they relate to homeland and hostland. Focusing on young Ethiopian diasporans, the author examines the social constructedness of diasporic identities in constant and complex negotiations with the signs and symbols of the homeland but also by appropriating and deploying the language and politics of their adopted homeland. Such navigation involves fissures and tensions that often disrupt inherited assumptions while allowing for critical adoptions and adaptations.

Likewise, Gulema and Solomon interrogate the very idea of Ethiopia in the context of the changing meaning of what Ethiopia is, what it wants to be, and what it means to be Ethiopian. The diasporic space in all its complexity has become a productive arena for simultaneously affirming and contesting cultural and historical signifiers of a nation; navigating and negotiating multiple and overlapping identities; and fashioning new ways of self-representation in transitional spaces. Diasporic discourses, especially those on social media, reimagine Ethiopia as something ancient and modern, considerably diverse, a mosaic of nations, but with a deep history of exclusion, and in danger of fragmentation. In place of a simplistic one-dimensional account of Ethiopia, there are now multiple, and at times oppositional, conceptions of the country. Apparently disruptive, even deconstructive, such musings and interpretations are generative and offer new perspectives and

frameworks with which we can grapple with the tensions of nation, the issues of liminal belonging, and the in-betweenness of transnational existence.

Elizabeth Chacko and Peter Gebre's "The Ethiopian Diaspora's Philanthropy toward Homeland Development: Motivations, Patterns, and Prospects" and Mary Goitom's "*Mahbereseb*: Traditional Community-Based Mechanisms and Responses that Support and Facilitate the Health and Well-Being of Ethiopian Immigrants in Canada" continue the discussion on the social and historical construction of identities, both national and transnational, through the deployment of discursive, social, and cultural practices. Exploring the history and politics of diasporic philanthropy, Chacko and Gebre interrogate how diasporic Ethiopians use remittance, investment in local development, and skill and technology transfer to build and deepen transnational connections while forging a profound sense of place and community in their destination countries. Diasporic philanthropy, which is a growing phenomenon, represents a major shift in the story of African migration, from being a classic case of one-directional brain drain to a trajectory in which such migration patterns as return and circular mobility boost possibilities for brain gain. An expansive understanding of new migration patterns and diasporic philanthropic engagements demonstrate how transnational links are or can be comprehensive, socially impactful, and politically consequential. Goitom's exploration of *Mahbereseb* complicates the discussion by teasing out the multiple and dynamic features of diasporic engagements. Unlike Chacko and Gebre, whose focus is to show how the diaspora engages the homeland, Goitom shifts the focus to the analysis of diasporic spaces, lives, and practices and their strategies of survival and adjustment. Using *Mahbereseb*, a community-based association, she shows how the homeland serves as an inexhaustible source of cultural codes, norms, and practices that can be reappropriated and adjusted in the service of diasporic needs, notably in attending to the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of Ethiopian immigrants.

Hewan Girma's "Songs of *Sidet*: An Insight into Ethiopia's Culture of Migration through Song Lyrics" sets the discursive context for the five papers that discuss the patterns and dynamics of contemporary Ethiopian migration. Through a critical interrogation of cultural production, songs, and lyrics in particular, Girma examines the intersections of Ethiopian music and modern migration and offers a nuanced insight into the Ethiopian cultural understanding of migration. Going beyond a binary analysis in which migration and migrants are either celebrated or condemned, Girma offers a more nuanced interpretation of the cultural perceptions of migration highlighting dissonance and ambivalence rather than certainty and consistency, difference over similitude, adaptability instead of rigidity. In so doing, Girma avoids the perils of one-dimensional accounts and presents instead an interpretation

that is truthful to the multilayered lived experience of migrants and the complexity of the migration process.

The five chapters under the Geographies of Migration section map out and examine the spatial, temporal, and experiential dynamics of the global Ethiopian migration. Methodologically, they foreground the need to go beyond conceptual dualities of home and destination countries that are analytically simplistic and obfuscating and instead develop a framework of analysis that underlies the importance of complexity, ambivalence, interpenetration, and difference. Some of the key themes that tie the chapters and organize the discussions include the inventiveness of migrants against all odds, the incongruities that exist between dreams and deeds, the multiplicity of migrant experiences, and the transformational, not least contradictory, implications of the migration process. In “Im/mobile Lives? Ethiopian Domestic Workers in the Middle East,” Marina de Regt deploys intersectionality as a productive analytical tool to demonstrate how gender and age, not just class or religion, intersect in a complex web of relationships to shape migrants, especially women migrants,’ “decision” to migrate, circulate, return, or stay. Questions of mobility and immobility are interpreted not as two distinct categories of practice and analysis but as interconnected modes of existence that often occur simultaneously.

The remaining four chapters examine the patterns, features, and trajectories that organize the Ethiopian transnational migration and the making of the global Ethiopian diaspora. Using area-specific case studies including South Africa, Germany, and Australia, the authors investigate the conditions, structures, infrastructures, institutions, and processes that shape a migrant’s decision regarding migration and mobility within and between countries. Mulugeta Dinbabo’s “Ethiopian Diasporans in South Africa: Dynamics of Migration, Opportunities, and Challenges” presents a discussion of opportunities, challenges, and migration dynamics that account for the emergence of a specific phenomenon of Ethiopian migration. Criminality, irregularity, liminality, and disjuncture illuminate his analysis. Fitsum R. Teddla and Tesfaye Semela’s chapter “Ethiopian Irregular Migrants to Germany: Trajectory of Voyages and the Reality Gap in Expectations” engages notions of irregularity, irregular migrants, and foreseeable dangers and applies the framework of aspiration-capability to the study of Ethiopian migration. In “Ethiopians in Australia: Race, Ethnicity and Othering,” Hewan Girma uncovers the many layers of racial and ethno-national identities in a white hegemonic society. In “Drivers and Patterns of Ethiopian Youth Migration to Global Destinations,” Tekalign Ayalew shifts the focus of analysis to an understanding of the specific challenges potential migrants, predominantly the young, face and the intermediate conditions that generate migration aspirations, shape decisions, and sustain mobilities over time.

Put together, the thirteen chapters tell multiple but deeply interconnected stories of Ethiopian transnational migration and diasporization. The book clearly shows that the processes involved in migration are complex and dynamic and that the experiences migrants go through are transformative. In giving a nuanced account of such a profoundly complex phenomenon as migration and the making of a diaspora, the book seeks to make an important contribution to the production of a critical knowledge about a human condition that is reshaping societies, communities, nations, and the world at large.

Future Themes

It is impossible to cover all the important topics on the multifaceted migration of Ethiopians and its ensuing global and multiple diasporas. Therefore, the editors envision *The Global Ethiopian Diaspora* as a two-volume book project. We have accordingly identified key themes that will form the nucleus of our forthcoming second volume. This includes return and circular migration, a phenomenon that has become an important aspect of contemporary migration. The more conventional understanding of migration in which migrants tend to move between two different points of origin and destination has now become incapable of explaining new trends and processes that question our earlier assumptions. Partly stemming from globalization and the transformation in transport and communication technologies, migration has assumed a more dynamic nature in which migrants engage in constant circulation between multiple points dispersed around the world. This phenomenon expands the scope of dispersal, deepens the experience of migrants, and transforms the nature of affinities and affiliations. In short, mobility as a human condition is undergoing a fundamental transformation, further complicating while enriching the migration experience. Therefore, return and circular migration, phenomena that have become important aspects of contemporary migration need to be discussed in depth.

One consequence of the rise of circulation as a new migration phenomenon is the emergence of new forms and practices of membership or belonging. Increasingly, dual or even multiple citizenship are becoming a new condition of possibility, an accepted fact of life. A new conception of citizenship means a new understanding of nation, national identity, national community, and patriotism. All this fundamentally complicates or even disrupts the conventional assumptions of what is to be a nation, a citizen, and a member of a national community. Im/migrants as citizens (dual or multiple) are gaining new powers to redefine their place in the world and new ways to deploy their agency. They speak more than one language, belong to

more than one nation and one identity, and enjoy privileges in more than one country, including the right to elect and be elected. This is a profoundly disruptive development; it could equally be liberating and empowering with transformative potentials.

Ethiopia is yet to grant dual citizenship rights to its diaspora population of more than two million dispersed around the world. Nevertheless, members of the global Ethiopian diaspora have managed to shape policies and politics in Ethiopia as well as in the countries of destination where they have been granted citizenship rights. The social, economic, and political capital they have built in the diaspora is being translated, for better or worse, into a resource to promote (and obstruct) specific policies, ideologies, groupings, and individuals. While the government recognizes, albeit grudgingly, the power and resources of the diaspora and seeks to exploit that through favorable policies and actions (like a yellow card that grants special privileges to the diaspora, tax reliefs, custom-free imports), it also perceives them as a threat and simultaneously tries to limit their ability to exert pressure. The refusal to even entertain discussions of expanding citizenship is partly rooted in this conception of the diaspora as a threat (more than as a partner).

Other themes that the next volume will examine include the legal politics of immigration, the interface between culture, religion, and migration, and climate change and migration. The volume will also aim to explore the issue of remittances, which is growing in size and contributing considerably to balancing the budgets of receiving countries and enhancing their national development projects. However, mention should also be made of the limitations of remittance. Indeed, while some of those who remit are themselves financially struggling, the transaction cost of remitting is very high, sometimes reaching 20 percent, governments seek to control the flow of remittance, and remittance is at times used to fund activities that undermine state and inter-communal stability.

Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in general experience all kinds of human mobility including mixed and irregular migration, temporary job-seeking movements, and displacement because of environmental catastrophes. In the past few decades, because of diverse socioeconomic and political factors, Ethiopia was considered to be one of the main countries involved in sending migrants to different regions. However, as discussed in the introduction, due to its geographical location and better economic position in the Horn of Africa region, Ethiopia is currently also becoming a receiving country for migrants in the region. Some of those migrants arrive in Ethiopia through well-organized networks of Trafficking in Persons (TiP), as the country is considered to be a springboard that is widely used as a staging ground for regular and irregular migration to Europe and America. We need a better understanding of these inter-regional free and forced mobilities. Along

a similar vein, another important theme we shall address in volume two is trafficking and smuggling (child, labor, sex, organs, drugs, arms), which is growing significantly in the region and disproportionately affects vulnerable groups and communities. Therefore, we intend to critically explore the state of refuge and refugees, both those who are from outside the country and those who are internally displaced, as well as trafficking in the next volume.

The themes we have identified above do not constitute an exhaustive list, but rather point to the most significant lacunae in Ethiopian migration and diaspora studies, lacunae we aim to fill if we are to have a comprehensive in-depth survey of this multifaceted phenomenon.

Contributors

Alpha Abebe is an academic and community organizer from Toronto, Canada. She is currently an Assistant Professor with the Faculty of Humanities at McMaster University. Alpha completed her PhD in International Development at the University of Oxford, where her research examined how and why young people in the Ethiopian diaspora engage with development initiatives in Ethiopia.

Amsale Alemu is an Assistant Professor of History at Scripps College. She holds a PhD in African and African American Studies from Harvard University. Her current book project examines revolutionary thought and US geopolitics in the Horn of Africa, with attention to relationships among Ethiopian and Eritrean activists and anticolonial collaborators in the 1960s and 1970s.

Tekalign Ayalew obtained his PhD in Social Anthropology from Stockholm University, Sweden. At present, he is an Assistant Professor of Social Anthropology in the College of Social Sciences at Addis Ababa University and an affiliated researcher at Stockholm University. His research interests include human smuggling, trafficking, refugees, diaspora, migration industry, ethnic relations and conflict, transnationalism, youth, and health and wellbeing.

Kassaye Berhanu-Mac Donald was adopted from Northern Ethiopia to Canada in 1987. She has been active in the international adoptees' rights movement since 2012, in which capacity she has written articles for blogs, books, and online and print magazines. Kassaye also co-produced "Out of the Fog," a podcast about family separation. In 2022, Kassaye co-edited and published *Lions Roaring Far From Home: An Anthology by Ethiopian Adoptees*. In 2018, she legally changed her first and last names back to her original Ethiopian names. She lives in Montreal with her son.

Elizabeth Chacko is a Professor of Geography and International Affairs at George Washington University in Washington, DC. Her research is on migration, urbanization, and globalization with a focus on the Ethiopian and Asian Indian immigrant communities.

Marina de Regt is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in The Netherlands. Her research specializes in gender, labor, and migration in Yemen and Ethiopia. She received her PhD from the University of Amsterdam in 2003. She has published extensively and was involved in a number of short documentary films.

Mulugeta F. Dinbabo is a Professor of Development Studies at the University of Western Cape in South Africa. He obtained his doctoral degree in Development Studies from the University of Western Cape. Professor Dinbabo is the Chief Editor of the *African Human Mobility Review* (AHMR), an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal, accredited by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

Peter H. Gebre is an economist at the Gems of Wisdom Consulting in Washington, DC. Gebre has previously served as a member of the US Small Business Administration Advisory Committee, and as the Chair of the African Subcommittee of the DC Chamber of Commerce. His publications include *Conversations with Successful Ethiopian-American Entrepreneurs* (2004), “Leveraging the diaspora for development: lessons from Ethiopia” (co-authored, in *GeoJournal*, 2012), “Engaging the Ethiopian Diaspora: Policies, Practices, and Performance” (co-authored) in *Africa and Its Global Diaspora* (2017). Gebre had served in senior positions for the government of Ethiopia prior to joining the private sector.

Hewan Girma is an Assistant Professor in the African American and African Diaspora Studies program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She received her PhD in Sociology from Stony Brook University in New York. She formerly taught in the Global Studies and Geography department at Hofstra University in New York (2010–2018).

Mary Goitom, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the School of Social Work, York University. Her research explores migration, mobilities, diasporic connections, transnational processes, and social relations. Her work is centered on community-based research and is grounded in Ethiopian epistemologies and larger African traditional knowledge systems. Her work explores transnational social fields in relation to the constitution of settlement, citizenship, well-being, agency, resilience, and identity making.

Shimelis Bonsa Gulema is an Associate Professor of History and African Studies at Stony Brook University in New York. He completed his doctoral

studies in History at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He formerly taught in the History department at Addis Ababa University (1991–2003).

Tesfaye Semela received his PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Tübingen. He is currently DAAD's Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Justus-Liebig University, Gießen. Prof. Semela is a fellow of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS) and the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation. His research interests include childhood and youth education-migration nexus, intergroup relations, and gender and social development.

Nassisse Solomon holds a PhD from the Collaborative History and Migration and Ethnic Relations graduate program at Western University in London, Ontario. Featuring the voices of Ethiopians in the Diaspora alongside extensive archival research, her doctoral study examines Canada-Africa relations and the history of representations and perceptions of Ethiopians in Canada throughout the twentieth century.

Fitsum R. Teddla completed his PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Giessen. He holds an MA in Development Management from University of Bochum, Germany and an MA in Social Anthropology from Addis Ababa University. Dr. Teddla is currently an adviser for peace works.

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The Global Ethiopian Diaspora is a comprehensive scholarly work that offers a refreshingly critical analysis of the nature of modern Ethiopian migration and the making of the global Ethiopian diaspora. It explores its multiple origins, different and constantly evolving trajectories, and complex outcomes. A work of great range and depth, the book will be a useful resource for students, scholars, and professionals studying or interested in the subject of migration and diasporization.

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—Jonathan Crush, Balsillie School of International Affairs

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—Loren B. Landau, University of Oxford

